THE POEMS OF FRANÇOIS VILLON

Poems of Francois Villon

Biographical and Critical Essay

by

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY

By R. L. Stevenson

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François de Montcorbier, *alias* François des Loges, *alias* François Villon, *alias* Michel Mouton, Master of Arts in the University of Paris, was born in that city in the summer of 1431. It was a memorable year for France on other and higher considerations. A great-hearted girl and a poor-hearted boy made, the one her last, the other his first appearance on the public stage of that unhappy country. On the 30th of May the ashes of Joan of Arc were thrown into the Seine, and on the 2d of December our Henry Sixth made his Joyous Entry dismally enough into disaffected and depopulating Paris. Sword and fire still ravaged the open country. On a single April Saturday twelve hundred persons, besides children, made their escape out of the starving capital. The hangman, as is not uninteresting to note in connection with Master Francis, was kept hard at work in 1431; on the last of April and on the 4th of May alone, sixty-two bandits swung from Paris gibbets.[1] A

[1] *Bourgeois de Paris*, ed. Panthéon, pp. 688, 689.

more confused or troublous time it would have been difficult to select for a start in life. Not even a man's nationality was certain; for the people of Paris there was no such thing as a Frenchman. The English were the English indeed, but the French were only the Armagnacs, whom, with Joan of Arc at their head, they had beaten back from under their ramparts not two years before. Such public sentiment as they had centred about their dear Duke of Burgundy, and the dear Duke had no more urgent business than to keep out of their neighbourhood. . . . At least, and whether he liked it or not, our disreputable troubadour was tubbed and swaddled as a subject of the English crown.

We hear nothing of Villon's father except that he was poor and of mean extraction. His mother was given piously, which does not imply very much in an old Frenchwoman, and quite uneducated. He had an uncle, a monk in an abbey at Angers, who must have prospered beyond the family average, and was reported to be worth five or six hundred crowns. Of this uncle and his money-box the reader will hear once more. In 1448 Francis became a student of the University of Paris; in 1450 he took the degree of Bachelor, and in 1452 that of Master of Arts. His *bourse*, or the sum paid weekly for his board, was of the amount of two sous. Now two sous was about the price of a pound of salt butter in the bad times of 1417; it was the

price of half a pound in the worse times of 1419; and in 1444, just four years before Villon joined the University, it seems to have been taken as the average wage for a day's manual labour.[1] In short, it cannot have been a very profuse allowance to keep a sharp-set lad in breakfast and supper for seven mortal days; and Villon's share of the cakes and pastry and general good cheer, to which he is never weary of referring, must have been slender from the first.

The educational arrangements of the University of Paris were, to our way of thinking, somewhat incomplete. Worldly and monkish elements were presented in a curious confusion, which the youth might disentangle for himself. If he had an opportunity, on the one hand, of acquiring much hair-drawn divinity and a taste for formal disputation, he was put in the way of much gross and flaunting vice upon the other. The lecture room of a scholastic doctor was sometimes under the same roof with establishments of a very different and peculiarly unedifying order. The students had extraordinary privileges, which by all accounts they abused extraordinarily. And while some condemned themselves to an almost sepulchral regularity and seclusion, others fled the schools, swaggered in the street "with their thumbs in their girdle," passed the night in riot, and behaved themselves as the worthy forerunners of Jehan

[1] *Bourgeois*, pp. 627, 636, and 725.

Frollo in the romance of *Notre Dame de Paris*. Villon tells us himself that he was among the truants, but we hardly needed his avowal. The burlesque erudition in which he sometimes indulged implies no more than the merest smattering of knowledge; whereas his acquaintance with blackguard haunts and industries could only have been acquired by early and consistent impiety and idleness. He passed his degrees, it is true; but some of us who have been to modern universities will make their own reflections on the value of the test. As for his three pupils, Colin Laurent, Girard Gossouyn, and Jehan Marceau — if they were really his pupils in any serious sense — what can we say but God help them! And sure enough, by his own description, they turned out as ragged, rowdy, and ignorant as was to be looked for from the views and manners of their rare preceptor.

At some time or other, before or during his university career, the poet was adopted by Master Guillaume de Villon, chaplain of St. Benoît-le-Betourne near the Sorbonne. From him he borrowed the surname by which he is known to posterity. It was most likely from his house, called the *Porte Rouge*, and situated in a garden in the cloister of St. Benoit, that Master Francis heard the bell of the Sorbonne ring out the Angelus while he was finishing his *Small Testament* at Christmastide in 1456. Toward this benefactor he usually gets credit for a respectable display of gratitude. But

with his trap and pitfall style of writing, it is easy to make too sure. His sentiments are about as much to be relied on as those of a professional beggar; and in this, as in so many other matters, he comes toward us whining and piping the eye, and goes off again with a whoop and his finger to his nose. Thus, he calls Guillaume de Villon his "more than father," thanks him with a great show of sincerity for having helped him out of many scrapes, and bequeaths him his portion of renown. But the portion of renown which belonged to a young thief, distinguished (if, at the period when he wrote this legacy, he was distinguished at all) for having written some more or less obscene and scurrilous ballads, must have been little fitted to gratify the self-respect or increase the reputation of a benevolent ecclesiastic. The same remark applies to a subsequent legacy of the poet's library, with specification of one work which was plainly neither decent nor devout. We are thus left on the horns of a dilemma. If the chaplain was a godly, philanthropic personage, who had tried to graft good principles and good behaviour on this wild slip of an adopted son, these jesting legacies would obviously cut him to the heart. The position of an adopted son toward his adopted father is one full of delicacy; where a man lends his name he looks for great consideration. And this legacy of Villon's portion of renown may be taken as the mere fling of an unregenerate

scapegrace who has wit enough to recognise in his own shame the readiest weapon of offence against a prosy benefactor's feelings. The gratitude of Master Francis figures, on this reading, as a frightful *minus* quantity. If, on the other hand, those jests were given and taken in good humour, the whole relation between the pair degenerates into the unedifying complicity of a debauched old chaplain and a witty and dissolute young scholar. At this rate the house with the red door may have rung with the most mundane minstrelsy; and it may have been below its roof that Villon, through a hole in the plaster, studied, as he tells us, the leisures of a rich ecclesiastic.

It was, perhaps, of some moment in the poet's life that he should have inhabited the cloister of St. Benoît. Three of the most remarkable among his early acquaintances are Catherine de Vausselles, for whom he entertained a short-lived affection and an enduring and most unmanly resentment; Regnier de Montigny, a young black-guard of good birth; and Colin de Cayeux, a fellow with a marked aptitude for picking locks. Now we are on a foundation of mere conjecture, but it is at least curious to find that two of the canons of St. Benoît answered respectively to the names of Pierre de Vaucel and Etienne de Montigny, and that there was a householder called Nicolas de Cayeux in a street — the Rue des Poirees — in the immediate neighbourhood of the cloister. M. Longnon is

almost ready to identify Catherine as the niece of Pierre; Regnier as the nephew of Etienne, and Colin as the son of Nicholas. Without going so far, it must be owned that the approximation of names is significant. As we go on to see the part played by each of these persons in the sordid melodrama of the poet's life, we shall come to regard it as even more notable. Is it not Clough who has remarked that, after all, everything lies in juxtaposition? Many a man's destiny has been settled by nothing apparently more grave than a pretty face on the opposite side of the street and a couple of bad companions round the corner.

Catherine de Vausselles (or de Vaucel — the change is within the limits of Villon's license) had plainly delighted in the poet's conversation; near neighbours or not, they were much together; and Villon made no secret of his court, and suffered himself to believe that his feeling was repaid in kind. This may have been an error from the first, or he may have estranged her by subsequent misconduct or temerity. One can easily imagine Villon an impatient wooer. One thing, at least, is sure: that the affair terminated in a manner bitterly humilating to Master Francis. In presence of his lady-love, perhaps under her window and certainly with her connivance, he was unmercifully thrashed by one Noë le Joly — beaten, as he says himself, like dirty linen on the washing-board.

It is characteristic that his malice had notably increased between the time when he wrote the *Small Testament* immediately on the back of the occurrence, and the time when he wrote the *Large Testament* five years after. On the latter occasion nothing is too bad for his "damsel with the twisted nose," as he calls her. She is spared neither hint nor accusation, and he tells his messenger to accost her with the vilest insults. Villon, it is thought, was out of Paris when these amenities escaped his pen; or perhaps the strong arm of Noë le Joly would have been again in requisition. So ends the love story, if love story it may properly be called. Poets are not necessarily fortunate in love; but they usually fall among more romantic circumstances and bear their disappointment with a better grace.

The neighbourhood of Regnier de Montigny and Colin de Cayeux was probably more influential on his after life than the contempt of Catherine. For a man who is greedy of all pleasures, and provided with little money and less dignity of character, we may prophesy a safe and speedy voyage downward. Humble or even truckling virtue may walk unspotted in this life. But only those who despise the pleasures can afford to despise the opinion of the world. A man of a strong, heady temperament, like Villon, is very differently tempted. His eyes lay hold on all provocations greedily, and his heart flames

up at a look into imperious desire; he is snared and broached to by anything and everything, from a pretty face to a piece of pastry in a cookshop window; he will drink the rinsing of the wine cup, stay the latest at the tavern party; tap at the lit windows, follow the sound of singing, and beat the whole neighbourhood for another reveller, as he goes reluctantly homeward; and grudge himself every hour of sleep as a black empty period in which he cannot follow after pleasure. Such a person is lost if he have not dignity, or, failing that, at least pride, which is its shadow and in many ways its substitute. Master Francis, I fancy, would follow his own eager instincts without much spiritual struggle. And we soon find him fallen among thieves in sober, literal earnest, and counting as acquaintances the most disreputable people he could lay his hands on: fellows who stole ducks in Paris Moat; sergeants of the criminal court, and archers of the watch; blackguards who slept at night under the butchers' stalls, and for whom the aforesaid archers peered about carefully with lanterns; Regnier de Montigny, Colin de Cayeux, and their crew, all bound on a favouring breeze toward the gallows; the disorderly abbess of Port Royal, who went about at fair time with soldiers and thieves, and conducted her abbey on the queerest principles; and most likely Perette Mauger, the great Paris receiver of stolen goods, not yet dreaming, poor woman! of

the last scene of her career when Henry Cousin, executor of the high justice, shall bury her, alive and most reluctant, in front of the new Montigny gibbet.[1] Nay, our friend soon began to take a foremost rank in this society. He could string off verses, which is always an agreeable talent; and he could make himself useful in many other ways. The whole ragged army of Bohemia, and whosoever loved good cheer without at all loving to work and pay for it, are addressed in contemporary verses as the "Subjects of François Villon." He was a good genius to all hungry and unscrupulous persons; and became the hero of a whole legendary cycle of tavern tricks and cheateries. At best, these were doubtful levities, rather too thievish for a schoolboy, rather too gamesome for a thief. But he would not linger long in this equivocal border land. He must soon have complied with his surroundings. He was one who would go where the cannikin clinked, not caring who should pay; and from supping in the wolves' den, there is but a step to hunting with the pack. And here, as I am on the chapter of his degradation, I shall say all I mean to say about its darkest expression, and be done with it for good. Some chartiable critics see no more than a *jeu d'esprit*, a graceful and trifling exercise of the imagination, in the grimy ballad of Fat Peg (*Grosse Margot*). I am not able to follow

[1] *Chronique Scandaleuse*, ed. Panthéon, p. 237.

these gentlemen to this polite extreme. Out of all Villon's works that ballad stands forth in flaring reality, gross and ghastly, as a thing written in a contraction of disgust. M. Longnon shows us more and more clearly at every page that we are to read our poet literally, that his names are the names of real persons, and the events he chronicles were actual events. But even if the tendency of criticism had run the other way, this ballad would have gone far to prove itself. I can well understand the reluctance of worthy persons in this matter; for of course it is unpleasant to think of a man of genius as one who held, in the words of Marina to Boult —

> "A place, for which the pained'st fiend
> Of hell would not in reputation change."

But beyond this natural unwillingness, the whole difficulty of the case springs from a highly virtuous ignorance of life. Paris now is not so different from the Paris of then; and the whole of the doings of Bohemia are not written in the sugar-candy pastorals of Murger. It is really not at all surprising that a young man of the fifteenth century, with a knack of making verses, should accept his bread upon disgraceful terms. The race of those who do is not extinct; and some of them to this day write the prettiest verses imaginable. . . . After this, it were impossible for Master Francis to fall lower: to go and steal for himself would be an admirable ad-

vance from every point of view, divine or human.

And yet it is not as a thief, but as a homicide, that he makes his first appearance before angry justice. On June 5, 1455, when he was about twenty-four, and had been Master of Arts for a matter of three years, we behold him for the first time quite definitely. Angry justice had, as it were, photographed him in the act of his homicide; and M. Longnon, rummaging among old deeds, has turned up the negative and printed it off for our instruction. Villon had been supping — copiously we may believe — and sat on a stone bench in front of the Church of St. Benoît, in company with a priest called Gilles and a woman of the name of Isabeau. It was nine o'clock, a mighty late hour for the period, and evidently a fine summer's night. Master Francis carried a mantle, like a prudent man, to keep him from the dews (*serain*), and had a sword below it dangling from his girdle. So these three dallied in front of St. Benoît, taking their pleasure (*pour soy esbatre*). Suddenly there arrived upon the scene a priest, Philippe Chermoye or Sermaise, also with sword and cloak, and accompanied by one Master Jehan le Mardi. Sermaise, according to Villon's account, which is all we have to go upon, came up blustering and denying God; as Villon rose to make room for him upon the bench, thrust him rudely back into his place; and finally drew his sword and cut open his

lower lip, by what I should imagine was a very clumsy stroke. Up to this point, Villon professes to have been a model of courtesy, even of feebleness; and the brawl, in his version, reads like the fable of the wolf and the lamb. But now the lamb was roused; he drew his sword, stabbed Sermaise in the groin, knocked him on the head with a big stone, and then, leaving him to his fate, went away to have his own lip doctored by a barber of the name of Fouquet. In one version, he says that Gilles, Isabeau, and Le Mardi ran away at the first high words, and that he and Sermaise had it out alone; in another, Le Mardi is represented as returning and wresting Villon's sword from him: the reader may please himself. Sermaise was picked up, lay all that night in the prison of St. Benoît, where he was examined by an official of the Châtelet and expressly pardoned Villon, and died on the following Saturday in the Hôtel Dieu.

This, as I have said, was in June. Not before January of the next year could Villon extract a pardon from the king; but while his hand was in, he got two. One is for "François des Loges, alias (*autrement dit*) de Villon;" and the other runs in the name of François de Montcorbier. Nay, it appears there was a further complication; for in the narrative of the first of these documents, it is mentioned that he passed himself off upon

Fouquet, the barber-surgeon, as one Michel Mouton. M. Longnon has a theory that this unhappy accident with Sermaise was the cause of Villon's subsequent irregularities; and that up to that moment he had been the pink of good behaviour. But the matter has to my eyes a more dubious air. A pardon necessary for Des Loges and another for Montcorbier? and these two the same person? and one or both of them known by the *alias* of Villon, however honestly come by? and lastly, in the heat of the moment, a fourth name thrown out with an assured countenance? A ship is not to be trusted that sails under so many colours. This is not the simple bearing of innocence. No — the young master was already treading crooked paths; already, he would start and blench at a hand upon his shoulder, with the look we know so well in the face of Hogarth's Idle Apprentice; already, in the blue devils, he would see Henry Cousin, the executor of high justice, going in dolorous procession toward Montfaucon, and hear the wind and the birds crying around Paris gibbet.

In spite of the prodigious number of people who managed to get hanged, the fifteenth century was by no means a bad time for criminals. A great confusion of parties and great dust of fighting favoured the escape of private housebreakers and quiet fellows who

stole ducks in Paris Moat. Prisons were leaky; and as we shall see, a man with a few crowns in his pocket and perhaps some acquaintance among the officials, could easily slip out and become once more a free marauder. There was no want of a sanctuary where he might harbour until troubles blew by; and accomplices helped each other with more or less good faith. Clerks, above all, had remarkable facilities for a criminal way of life; for they were privileged, except in cases of notorious incorrigibility, to be plucked from the hands of rude secular justice and tried by a tribunal of their own. In 1402, a couple of thieves, both clerks of the University, were condemned to death by the Provost of Paris. As they were taken to Montfaucon, they kept crying "high and clearly" for their benefit of clergy, but were none the less pitilessly hanged and gibbeted. Indignant Alma Mater interfered before the king; and the Provost was deprived of all royal offices, and condemned to return the bodies and erect a great stone cross, on the road from Paris to the gibbet, graven with the effigies of these two holy martyrs.[1] We shall hear more of the benefit of clergy; for after this the reader will not be surprised to meet with thieves in the shape of tonsured clerks, or even priests and monks.

To a knot of such learned pilferers our poet certainly belonged; and by turning over a few

[1] Monstrelet: *Panthéon Littéraire*, p. 26.

more of M. Longnon's negatives, we shall get a clear idea of their character and doings. Montigny and De Cayeux are names already known; Guy Tabary, Petit-Jehan, Dom Nicholas, little Thibault, who was both clerk and goldsmith, and who made picklocks and melted plate for himself and his companions — with these the reader has still to become acquainted. Petit-Jehan and De Cayeux were handy fellows and enjoyed a useful pre-eminence in honour of their doings with the picklock. "*Dictus des Cahyeus est fortis operator crochetorum*," says Tabary's interrogation, "*sed dictus Petit-Jehan, ejus socius, est forcius operator.*" But the flower of the flock was little Thibault; it was reported that no lock could stand before him; he had a persuasive hand; let us salute capacity wherever we may find it. Perhaps the term *gang* is not quite properly applied to the persons whose fortunes we are now about to follow; rather they were independent malefactors, socially intimate, and occasionally joining together for some serious operation, just as modern stockjobbers form a syndicate for an important loan. Nor were they at all particular to any branch of misdoing. They did not scrupulously confine themselves to a single sort of theft, as I hear is common among modern thieves. They were ready for anything, from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter. Montigny, for instance, had neglected neither of these extremes, and we find him accused

of cheating at games of hazard on the one hand, and on the other with the murder of one Thevenin Pensete in a house by the Cemetery of St. John. If time had only spared us some particulars, might not this last have furnished us with the matter of a grisly winter's tale?

At Christmas-time in 1456, readers of Villon will remember that he was engaged on the *Small Testament.* About the same period, *circa festum nativitatis Domini*, he took part in a memorable supper at the Mule Tavern, in front of the Church of St. Mathurin. Tabary, who seems to have been very much Villon's creature, had ordered the supper in the course of the afternoon. He was a man who had had troubles in his time and languished in the Bishop of Paris's prisons on a suspicion of picking locks; confiding, convivial, not very astute — who had copied out a whole improper romance with his own right hand. This supper party was to be his first introduction to De Cayeux and Petit-Jehan, which was probably a matter of some concern to the poor man's muddy wits; in the sequel, at least, he speaks of both with an undisguised respect, based on professional inferiority in the matter of picklocks. Don Nicholas, a Picardy monk, was the fifth and last at table. When supper had been despatched and fairly washed down, we may suppose, with white Baigneux or red Beaune which were favourite wines among the fellow-

ship, Tabary was solemnly sworn over to secrecy on the night's performances; and the party left the Mule and proceeded to an unoccupied house belonging to Robert Saint-Simon. This, over a low wall, they entered without difficulty. All but Tabary took off their upper garments; a ladder was found and applied to the high wall which separated Saint-Simon's house from the court of the College of Navarre; the four fellows in their shirt-sleeves (as we might say) clambered over in a twinkling: and Master Guy Tabary remained alone beside the overcoats. From the court the burglars made their way into the vestry of the chapel, where they found a large chest, strengthened with iron bands and closed with four locks. One of these locks they picked, and then, by levering up the corner, forced the other three. Inside was a small coffer, of walnut wood, also barred with iron, but fastened with only three locks, which were all comfortably picked by way of the keyhole. In the walnut coffer — a joyous sight by our thieves' lantern — were five hundred crowns of gold. There was some talk of opening the aumries, where, if they had only known, a booty eight or nine times greater lay ready to their hand; but one of the party (I have a humourous suspicion it was Dom Nicolas, the Picardy monk) hurried them away. It was ten o'clock when they mounted the ladder; it was about midnight before Tabary beheld them coming back. To him

they gave ten crowns, and promised a share of a two-crown dinner on the morrow; whereat we may suppose his mouth watered. In course of time, he got wind of the real amount of their booty and understood how scurvily he had been used; but he seems to have borne no malice. How could he, against such superb operators as Petit-Jehan and De Cayeux; or a person like Villon, who could have made a new improper romance out of his own head, instead of merely copying an old one with mechanical right hand?

The rest of the winter was not uneventful for the gang. First they made a demonstration against the Church of St. Mathurin after chalices, and were ignominiously chased away by barking dogs. Then Tabary fell out with Casin Chollet, one of the fellows who stole ducks in Paris Moat, who subsequently became a sergeant of the Châtelet and distinguished himself by misconduct, followed by imprisonment and public castigation, during the wars of Louis Eleventh. The quarrel was not conducted with a proper regard to the king's peace, and the pair publicly belaboured each other until the police stepped in, and Master Tabary was cast once more into the prisons of the Bishop. While he still lay in durance, another job was cleverly executed by the band in broad daylight, at the Augustine Monastery. Brother Guillaume Coiffier was beguiled by an accomplice to St. Mathurin to say mass; and during his absence, his

chamber was entered and five or six hundred crowns in money and some silver plate successfully abstracted. A melancholy man was Coiffier on his return! Eight crowns from this adventure were forwarded by little Thibault to the incarcerated Tabary; and with these he bribed the jailer and reappeared in Paris taverns. Some time before or shortly after this, Villon set out for Angers, as he had promised in the *Small Testament*. The object of this excursion was not merely to avoid the presence of his cruel mistress or the strong arm of Noë le Joly, but to plan a deliberate robbery on his uncle the monk. As soon as he had properly studied the ground, the others were to go over in force from Paris — picklocks and all — and away with my uncle's strongbox! This throws a comical sidelight on his own accusation against his relatives, that they had "forgotten natural duty" and disowned him because he was poor. A poor relation is a distasteful circumstance at the best, but a poor relation who plans deliberate robberies against those of his blood, and trudges hundreds of weary leagues to put them into execution, is surely a little on the wrong side of toleration. The uncle at Angers may have been monstrously undutiful; but the nephew from Paris was upsides with him.

On the 23d April, that venerable and discreet person, Master Pierre Marchand, Curate and Prior of Paray-le-Monial, in the diocese

of Chartres, arrived in Paris and put up at the sign of the Three Chandeliers, in the Rue de la Huchette. Next day, or the day after, as he was breakfasting at the sign of the Arm-chair, he fell into talk with two customers, one of whom was a priest and the other our friend Tabary. The idiotic Tabary became mighty confidential as to his past life. Pierre Marchand, who was an acquaintance of Guillaume Coiffier's and had sympathised with him over his loss, pricked up his ears at the mention of picklocks, and led on the transcriber of improper romances from one thing to another, until they were fast friends. For picklocks the Prior of Paray professed a keen curiosity; but Tabary, upon some late alarm, had thrown all his into the Seine. Let that be no difficulty, however, for was there not little Thibault, who could make them of all shapes and sizes, and to whom Tabary, smelling an accomplice, would be only too glad to introduce his new acquaintance? On the morrow, accordingly, they met; and Tabary, after having fiirst wet his whistle at the Prior's expense, led him to Notre Dame and presented him to four or five "young companions," who were keeping sanctuary in the church. They were all clerks, recently escaped, like Tabary himself, from the episcopal prisons. Among these we may notice Thibault, the operator, a little fellow of twenty-six, wearing long hair behind. The Prior expressed, through Tabary, his anxiety

to become their accomplice and altogether such as they were (*de leur sorte et de leurs complices*). Mighty polite they showed themselves, and made him many fine speeches in return. But for all that, perhaps because they had longer heads than Tabary, perhaps because it is less easy to wheedle men in a body, they kept obstinately to generalities and gave him no information as to their exploits, past, present, or to come. I suppose Tabary groaned under this reserve; for no sooner were he and the Prior out of the church than he fairly emptied his heart to him, gave him full details of many hanging matters in the past, and explained the future intentions of the band. The scheme of the hour was to rob another Augustine monk, Robert de la Porte, and in this the Prior agreed to take a hand with simulated greed. Thus, in the course of two days, he had turned his wine-skin of a Tabary inside out. For awhile longer the farce was carried on; the Prior was introduced to Petit-Jehan, whom he describes as a little, very smart man of thirty, with a black beard and a short jacket; an appointment was made and broken in the De la Porte affair; Tabary had some breakfast at the Prior's charge and leaked out more secrets under the influence of wine and friendship; and then all of a sudden, on the 17th of May, an alarm sprang up, the Prior picked up his skirts and walked quietly over to the Châtelet to make a deposition, and the whole

band took to their heels and vanished out of Paris and the sight of the police.

Vanish as they like, they all go with a clog about their feet. Sooner or later, here or there, they will be caught in the fact, and ignominiously sent home. From our vantage of four centuries afterward, it is odd and pitiful to watch the order in which the fugitives are captured and dragged in.

Montigny was the first. In August of that same year, he was laid by the heels on many grievous counts; sacrilegious robberies, frauds, incorrigibility, and that bad business about Thevenin Pensete in the house by the Cemetery of St. John. He was reclaimed by the ecclesiastical authorities as a clerk; but the claim was rebutted on the score of incorrigibility, and ultimately fell to the ground; and he was condemned to death by the Provost of Paris. It was a very rude hour for Montigny, but hope was not yet over. He was a fellow of some birth; his father had been king's pantler; his sister, probably married to some one about the Court, was in the family way, and her health would be endangered if the execution was proceeded with. So down comes Charles the Seventh with letters of mercy, commuting the penalty to a year in a dungeon on bread and water, and a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James in Galicia. Alas! the document was incomplete; it did not contain the full tale of Montigny's enormities; it did not recite that he

had been denied benefit of clergy, and it said nothing about Thevenin Pensete. Montigny's hour was at hand. Benefit of clergy, honourable descent from king's pantler, sister in the family way, royal letters of commutation — all were of no avail. He had been in prison in Rouen, in Tours, in Bordeaux, and four times already in Paris; and out of all these he had come scathless; but now he must make a little excursion as far as Montfaucon with Henry Cousin, executor of high justice. There let him swing among the carrion crows.

About a year later, in July 1458, the police laid hands on Tabary. Before the ecclesiastical commissary he was twice examined, and, on the latter occasion, put to the question ordinary and extraordinary. What a dismal change from pleasant suppers at the Mule, where he sat in triumph with expert operators and great wits! He is at the lees of life, poor rogue; and those fingers which once transcribed improper romances are now agonisingly stretched upon the rack. We have no sure knowledge, but we may have a shrewd guess of the conclusion. Tabary, the admirer, would go the same way as those whom he admired.

The last we hear of is Colin de Cayeux. He was caught in autumn 1460, in the great Church of St. Leu d'Esserens, which makes so fine a figure in the pleasant Oise valley between Creil and Beaumont. He was re-

claimed by no less than two bishops; but the Procurer for the Provost held fast by incorrigible Colin. 1460 was an ill-starred year: for justice was making a clean sweep of "poor and indigent persons, thieves, cheats, and lockpickers," in the neighbourhood of Paris;[1] and Colin de Cayeux, with many others, was condemned to death and hanged.[2]

Villon was still absent on the Angers expedition when the Prior of Paray sent such a bombshell among his accomplices; and the dates of his return and arrest remain undiscoverable. M. Campaux plausibly enough opined for the autumn of 1457, which would make him closely follow on Montigny, and the first of those denounced by the Prior to fall into the toils. We may suppose, at least, that it was not long thereafter; we may suppose him competed for between lay and clerical Courts; and we may suppose him alternately pert and impudent, humble and fawning, in his defence. But at the end of all supposing, we come upon some nuggets of fact. For first, he was put to the question

[1] *Chron. Scand.*, ut supra.

[2] Here and there, principally in the order of events, this article differs from M. Longnon's own reading of his material. The ground on which he defers the execution of Montigny and De Cayeux beyond the date of their trials seems insufficient. There is a law of parsimony for the construction of historical documents; simplicity is the first duty of narration; and hanged they were.

by water. He who had tossed off so many cups of white Baigneux or red Beaume, now drank water through linen folds, until his bowels were flooded and his heart stood still. After so much raising of the elbow, so much outcry of fictitious thirst, here at last was enough drinking for a lifetime. Truly, of our pleasant vices, the gods make whips to scourge us. And secondly he was condemned to be hanged. A man may have been expecting a catastrophe for years, and yet find himself unprepared when it arrives. Certainly, Villon found, in this legitimate issue of his career, a very staggering and grave consideration. Every beast, as he says, clings bitterly to a whole skin. If everything is lost, and even honour, life still remains; nay, and it becomes, like the ewe lamb in Nathan's parable, as dear as all the rest. "Do you fancy," he asks, in a lively ballad, "that I had not enough philosophy under my hood to cry out: 'I appeal'? If I had made any bones about the matter, I should have been planted upright in the fields, by the St. Denis Road" — Montfaucon being on the way to St. Denis. An appeal to Parliament, as we saw in the case of Colin de Cayeux, did not necessarily lead to an acquittal or a commutation; and while the matter was pending, our poet had ample opportunity to reflect on his position. Hanging is a sharp argument, and to swing with many others on the gibbet adds a horrible

corollary for the imagination. With the aspect of Montfaucon he was well acquainted; indeed, as the neighbourhood appears to have been sacred to junketing and nocturnal picnics of wild young men and women, he had probably studied it under all varieties of hour and weather. And now, as he lay in prison waiting the mortal push, these different aspects crowded back on his imagination with a new and startling significance; and he wrote a ballad, by way of epitaph for himself and his companions, which remains unique in the annals of mankind. It is, in the highest sense, a piece of his biography:

"La pluye nous a debuez et lavez,
Et le soleil dessechez et noirciz;
Pies, corbeaulx, nous ont les yeux cavez,
Et arrachez la barbe et les sourcilz.
Jamais, nul temps, nous ne sommes rassis;
Puis, çà, puis là, comme le vent varie,
A son plais ir sans cesser nous charie,
Plus becquetez d'oiseaulx que dez à couldre.
Ne soyez donc de nostre confrairie,
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absouldre."

Here is some genuine theives' literature after so much that was spurious; sharp as an etching, written with a shuddering soul. There is an intensity of consideration in the piece that shows it to be the transcript of familiar thoughts. It is the quintessence of many a doleful nightmare on the straw, when he felt himself swing helpless in the wind, and saw the birds turn about him, screaming and menacing his eyes.

And, after all, the Parliament changed his sentence into one of banishment; and to Roussillon, in Dauphiny, our poet must carry his woes without delay. Travellers between Lyons and Marseilles may remember a station on the line, some way below Vienne, where the Rhone fleets seaward between vine-clad hills This was Villon's Siberia. It would be a little warm in summer perhaps, and a little cold in winter in that draughty valley between two great mountain fields; but what with the hills, and the racing river, and the fiery Rhone wines, he was little to be pitied on the conditions of his exile. Villon, in a remarkably bad ballad, written in a breath, heartily thanked and fulsomely belauded the Parliament; the *envoi*, like the proverbial postscript of a lady's letter, containing the pith of his performance in a request for three days' delay to settle his affairs and bid his friends farewell. He was probably not followed out of Paris, like Antoine Fradin, the popular preacher, another exile of a few years later, by weeping multitudes;[1] but I dare say one or two rogues of his acquaintance would keep him company for a mile or so on the south road, and drink a bottle with him before they turned. For banished people, in those days, seem to have set out on their own responsibility, in their own guard, and at their own expense. It was no joke to make one's way from Paris to Roussillon alone and

[1] *Chron. Scand.*, p. 338.

penniless in the fifteenth century. Villon says he left a rag of his tails on every bush. Indeed, he must have had many a weary tramp, many a slender meal, and many a to-do with blustering captains of the Ordonnance. But with one of his light fingers, we may fancy that he took as good as he gave; for every rag of his tail, he would manage to indemnify himself upon the population in the shape of food, or wine, or ringing money; and his route would be traceable across France and Burgundy by housewives and inn-keepers lamenting over petty thefts, like the track of a single human locust. A strange figure he must have cut in the eyes of the good country people: this ragged, blackguard city poet, with a smack of the Paris student, and a smack of the Paris street arab, posting along the highways, in rain or sun, among the green fields and vine-yards. For himself, he had no taste for rural loveliness; green fields and vineyards would be mighty indifferent to Master Francis; but he would often have his tongue in his cheek at the simplicity of rustic dupes, and often, at city gates, he might stop to contemplate the gibbet with its swinging bodies, and hug himself on his escape.

How long he stayed at Roussillon, how far he became the protégé of the Bourbons, to whom that town belonged, or when it was that he took part, under the auspices of Charles of Orleans, in a rhyming tournament to be

referred to once again in the pages of the present volume, are matters that still remain in darkness, in spite of M. Longnon's diligent rummaging among archives. When we next find him, in summer 1461, alas! he is once more in durance: this time at Méun-sur-Loire, in the prisons of Thibault d'Aussigny, Bishop of Orleans. He had been lowered in a basket into a noisome pit, where he lay, all summer, gnawing hard crusts and railing upon fate. His teeth, he says, were like the teeth of a rake: a touch of haggard portraiture all the more real for being excessive and burlesque, and all the more proper to the man for being a caricature of his own misery. His eyes were "bandaged with thick walls." It might blow hurricanes overhead; the lightning might leap in high heaven; but no word of all this reached him in his noisome pit. "Il n'entre, ou gist, n'escler ni tourbillon." Above all, he was fevered with envy and anger at the freedom of others; and his heart flowed over into curses as he thought of Thibault d'Aussigny, walking the streets in God's sunlight, and blessing people with extended fingers. So much we find sharply lined in his own poems. Why he was cast again into prison — how he had again managed to shave the gallows — this we know not, nor, from the destruction of authorities, are we ever likely to learn. But on October 2, 1461, or some day immediately preceding, the new

king, Louis Eleventh, made his joyous entry into Méun. Now it was a part of the formality on such occasions for the new king to liberate certain prisoners; and so the basket was let down into Villon's pit, and hastily did Master Francis scramble in, and was most joyfully hauled up, and shot out, blinking and tottering, but once more a free man, into the blessed sun and wind. Now or never is the time for verses! Such a happy revolution would turn the head of a stocking-weaver, and set him jingling rhymes. And so — after a voyage to Paris, where he finds Montigny and De Cayeux clattering their bones upon the gibbet, and his three pupils roystering in Paris streets, "with their thumbs under their girdles," — down sits Master Francis to write his *Large Testament*, and perpetuate his name in a sort of glorious ignominy.

Of this capital achievement and, with it of Villon's style in general, it is here the place to speak. The *Large Testament* is a hurly-burly of cynical and sentimental reflections about life, jesting legacies to friends and enemies, and, interspersed among these, many admirable ballades, both serious and absurd. With so free a design, no thought that occurred to him would need to be dismissed without expression; and he could draw at full length the portrait of his own bedevilled soul, and of the bleak and blackguardly world which

was the theatre of his exploits and sufferings. If the reader can conceive something between the slap-dash inconsequence of Byron's *Don Juan* and the racy humourous gravity and brief noble touches that distinguish the vernacular poems of Burns, he will have formed some idea of Villon's style. To the latter writer — except in the ballades, which are quite his own, and can be paralleled from no other language known to me — he bears a particular resemblance. In common with Burns he has a certain rugged compression, a brutal vivacity of epithet, a homely vigour, a delight in local personalities, and an interest in many sides of life, that are often despised and passed over by more effete and cultured poets. Both also, in their strong, easy colloqual way, tend to become difficult and obscure; the obscurity in the case of Villon passing at times into the absolute darkness of cant language. They are perhaps the only two great masters of expression who keep sending their readers to a glossary.

"Shall we not dare to say of a thief," asks Montaigne, "that he has a handsome leg?" It is a far more serious claim that we have to put forward in behalf of Villon. Beside that of his contemporaries, his writing, so full of colour, so eloquent, so picturesque, stands out in an almost miraculous isolation. It only one or two of the chroniclers could have taken a leaf out of his book, history would have been a pastime and the fifteenth century as present to our

minds as the age of Charles Second. This gallows-bird was the one great writer of his age and country, and initiated modern literature for France. Boileau, long ago, in the period of perukes and snuff-boxes, recognised him as the first articulate poet in the language; and if we measure him, not by priority of merit, but living duration of influence, not on a comparison with obscure forerunners, but with great and famous successors, we shall install this ragged and disreputable figure in a far higher niche in glory's temple than was ever dreamed of by the critic. It is, in itself, a memorable fact that, before 1542, in the very dawn of printing, and while modern France was in the making, the works of Villon ran through seven different editions. Out of him flows much of Rabelais; and through Rabelais, directly and indirectly, a deep, permanent, and growing inspiration. Not only his style, but his callous pertinent way of looking upon the sordid and ugly sides of life, becomes every day a more specific feature in the literature of France. And only the other year, a work of some power appeared in Paris, and appeared with infinite scandal, which owed its whole inner significance and much of its outward form to the study of our rhyming thief.

The world to which he introduces us is, as before said, blackguardly and bleak. Paris swarms before us, full of famine, shame, and death; monks and the servants of great lords hold high wassail upon cakes and pastry; the

poor man licks his lips before the baker's window; people with patched eyes sprawl all night under the stalls; chuckling Tabary transcribes an improper romance; bare-bosomed lasses and ruffling students swagger in the streets; the drunkard goes stumbling homeward, the graveyard is full of bones; and away on Montfaucon, Colin de Cayeux and Montigny hang draggled in the rain. Is there nothing better to be seen than sordid misery and worthless joys? Only where the poor old mother of the poet kneels in church below painted windows, and makes tremulous supplication to the Mother of God.

In our mixed world, full of green fields and happy lovers, where not long before, Joan of Arc had led one of the highest and noblest lives in the whole story of mankind, this was all worth chronicling that our poet could perceive. His eyes were indeed sealed with his own filth. He dwelt all his life in a pit more noisome than the dungeon at Méun. In the moral world, also, there are large phenomena not cognisable out of holes and corners. Loud winds blow, speeding home deep-laden ships and sweeping rubbish from the earth; the lightning leaps and cleans the face of heaven; high purposes and brave passions shake and sublimate men's spirits; and meanwhile, in the narrow dungeon of his soul, Villon is mumbling crusts and picking vermin.

Along with this deadly gloom of outlook, we must take another characteristic of his work; its unrivalled insincerity. I can give no better

similitude of this quality than I have given already; that he comes up with a whine, and runs away with a whoop and his finger to his nose. His pathos is that of a professional mendicant who should happen to be a man of genius; his levity that of a bitter street arab, full of bread. On a first reading, the pathetic passages preoccupy the reader, and he is cheated out of an alms in the shape of sympathy. But when the thing is studied the illusion fades away; in the transitions, above all, we can detect the evil, ironical temper of the man; and instead of a flighty work, where many crude but genuine feelings tumble together for the mastery as in the lists of tournament, we are tempted to think of the *Large Testament* as of one long-drawn epical grimace, pulled by a merry-andrew, who has found a certain despicable eminence over human respect and human affections by perching himself astride upon the gallows. Between these two views, at best, all temperate judgments will be found to fall; and rather, as I imagine, toward the last.

There were two things on which he felt with perfect and, in one case, even threatening sincerity.

The first of these was an undisguised envy of those richer than himself. He was for ever drawing a parallel, already exemplified from his own words, between the happy life of the well-to-do and the miseries of the poor. Burns, too proud and honest not to work, continued through all reverses to sing of

poverty with a light, defiant note. Béranger waited till he was himself beyond the reach of want, before writing the *Old Vagabond* or *Jacques*. Samuel Johnson, although he was very sorry to be poor, "was a great arguer for the advantages of poverty" in his ill days. Thus it is that brave men carry their crosses, and smile with the fox burrowing in their vitals. But Villon, who had not the courage to be poor with honesty, now whiningly implores our sympathy, now shows his teeth upon the dung-heap with an ugly snarl. He envies bitterly, envies passionately. Poverty, he protests, drives men to steal, as hunger makes the wolf sally from the forest. The poor, he goes on, will always have a carping word to say, or, if that outlet be denied, nourish rebellious thoughts. It is a calumny on the noble army of the poor. Thousands in a small way of life, ay, and even in the smallest, go through life with tenfold as much honour and dignity and peace of mind, as the rich gluttons whose dainties and state-beds awakened Villon's covetous temper. And every morning's sun sees thousands who pass whistling to their toil. But Villon was the "mauvais pauvre" defined by Victor Hugo, and, in its English expression, so admirably stereotyped by Dickens. He was the first wicked sans-culotte. He is the man of genius with the moleskin cap. He is mighty pathetic and beseeching here in the street,

but I would not go down a dark road with him for a large consideration.

The second of the points on which he was genuine and emphatic was common to the middle ages; a deep and somewhat snivelling conviction of the transitory nature of this life and the pity and horror of death. Old age and the grave, with some dark and yet half-sceptical terror of an afterworld — these were ideas that clung about his bones like a disease. An old ape, as he says, may play all the tricks in its repertory, and none of them will tickle an audience into good humour. "Tousjours vieil synge est desplaisant." It is not the old jester who receives most recognition at a tavern party, but the young fellow, fresh and handsome, who knows the new slang, and carries off his vice with a certain air. Of this, as a tavern jester himself, he would be pointedly conscious. As for the women with whom he was best acquainted, his reflections on their old age, in all their harrowing pathos, shall remain in the original for me. Horace has disgraced himself to something the same tune; but what Horace throws out with an ill-favoured laugh, Villon dwells on with an almost maudlin whimper.

It is in death that he finds his truest inspiration; in the swift and sorrowful change that overtakes beauty; in the strange revolution by which great fortunes and renowns are diminished to a handful of churchyard dust; and in the utter passing away of what

was once lovable and mighty. It is in this that the mixed texture of his thought enables him to reach such poignant and terrible effects, and to enhance pity with ridicule, like a man cutting capers to a funeral march. It is in this, also, that he rises out of himself into the higher spheres of art. So, in the ballade by which he is best known, he rings the changes on names that once stood for beautiful and queenly women, and are now no more than letters and a legend. "Where are the snows of yester year?" runs the burden. And so, in another not so famous, he passes in review the different degrees of bygone men, from the holy Apostles and the golden Emperor of the East down to the heralds, pursuivants, and trumpeters, who also bore their part in the world's pageantries and ate greedily at great folks' tables: all this to the refrain of "So much carry the winds away!" Probably, there was some melancholy in his mind for a yet lower grade, and Montigny and Colin de Cayeux clattering their bones on Paris gibbet. Alas, and with so pitiful an experience of life, Villon can offer us nothing but terror and lamentation about death! No one has ever more skilfully communicated his own disenchantment; no one ever blown a more ear-piercing note of sadness. This unrepentant thief can attain neither to Christian confidence, nor to the spirit of the bright Greek saying, that whom the gods love die early. It is a poor heart, and a poorer age, that

cannot accept the conditions of life with some heroic readiness.

The date of the *Large Testament* is the last date in the poet's biography. After having achieved that admirable and despicable performance, he disappears into the night from whence he came. How or when he died, whether decently in bed or trussed up to a gallows, remains a riddle for foolhardy commentators. It appears his health had suffered in the pit at Méun, he was thirty years of age and quite bald, with the notch in his under lip where Sermaise had struck him with the sword, and what wrinkles the reader may imagine. In default of portraits, this is all I have been able to piece together, and perhaps even the baldness should be taken as a figure of his destitution. A sinister dog, in all likelihood, but with a look in his eye, and the loose flexible mouth that goes with wit and an overweening sensual temperament. Certainly the sorriest figure on the rolls of fame.

THE LESSER TESTAMENT

Here Beginneth the Lesser Testament
of
Master François Villon

I

THIS fourteen six and fiftieth year,
I François Villon, clerk that be,
Considering, with senses clear,
Bit betwixt teeth and collar-free,
That one must needs look orderly
Unto his works (as counselleth
Vegetius, wise Roman he),
Or else amiss one reckoneth,—

II

In this year, as before I said,
Hard by the dead of Christmas-time,
When upon wind the wolves are fed
And for the rigour of the rime
One hugs the hearth from none to prime,
Wish came to me to break the stress
Of that most dolorous prison-clime
Wherein Love held me in duresse.

III

Unto this fashion am I bent,
  Seeing my lady, 'neath my eyes,
To my undoing give consent,
  Sans gain to her in any wise:
  Whereof I plain me to the skies,
Requiring vengeance (her desert)
  Of all the gods with whom it lies,
And of Love, healing for my hurt.

IV

If to my gree, alack, I read
  Those dulcet looks and semblants fair
Of such deceitful goodlihead,
  That pierced me to the heart whilere,
  Now in the lurch they've left me bare
And failed me at my utmost need:
  Fain must I plant it otherwhere
And in fresh furrows strike my seed.

V

She that hath bound me with her eyes
  (Alack, how fierce and fell to me!),
Without my fault in any wise,
  Wills and ordains that I should dree
  Death and leave life and liberty.
Help see I none, save flight alone:
  She breaks the bonds betwixt her and me
Nor hearkens to my piteous moan.

VI

To 'scape the ills that hem me round,
It were the wiser to depart.
Adieu! To Angers I am bound,
Since she I love will nor impart
Her grace nor any of her heart.
I die — with body whole enough —
For her; a martyr to Love's smart,
Enrolled among the saints thereof.

VII

Sore though it be to part from her,
Needs must I go without delay.
(How hard my poor sense is to stir!)
Other than I with her's in play;
Whence never Bullen herring aye
Was drouthier of case than I.
A sorry business, wellaway,
It is for me, God hear my cry!

VIII

And since (need being on me laid)
I go and haply never may
Again return, (not being made
Of steel or bronze or other way
Than other men: life but a day
Lasteth and death knows no relent);
For me, I journey far away;
Wherefore I make this Testament.

IX

First, in the name of God the Lord,
  The Son and eke the Holy Spright,
And in her name by whose accord
  No creature perisheth outright,
  To Master Villon, Guillaume hight,
My fame I leave, that still doth swell
  In his name's honour day and night,
And eke my tents and pennoncel.

X

Item, to her, who, as I've said,
  So dourly banished me her sight
That all my gladness she forbade
  And ousted me of all delight,
  I leave my heart in deposite,
Piteous and pale and numb and dead.
  She brought me to this sorry plight:
May God not wreak it on her head!

XI

Item, my trenchant sword of steel
  I leave to Master Ythier
Marchant — to whom myself I feel
  No little bounden, — that he may,
  According to my will, defray
The scot for which in pawn it lies
  (Six sols), and then the sword convey
To Jehan le Cornu, free of price.

XII

Item, I leave to Saint Amand
  The Mule and eke the Charger White;
And to Blaru, my Diamond
  And Jibbing Ass with stripes bedight;
  And the decretal, too, that hight
Omnis utrius — that, to wit,
  Known as the counter-Carmelite —
Unto the priests I do commit.

XIII

To Jehan Tronne, butcher, I devise
  The Wether lusty and unpolled
And Gad to whisk away the flies,
  With the Crowned Ox, that's to be sold,
  And Cow, whereon the churl hath hold,
To hoist it on his back. If he
  To keep the beast himself make bold,
Trussed up and strangled let him be.

XIV

To master Robert Vallée (who,
  Poor clerkling to the Parliament,
Owns valley neither hill,) I do
  Will first, by this my Testament,
  My hose be giv'n incontinent,
Which on the clothes-pegs hang, that he
  May tire withal, 'tis my intent,
His mistress Jehanne more decently.

XV

But since he is of good extract,
Needs must he better guerdoned be
(For God His Law doth so enact)
Though featherbrained withal is he;
They shall, I have bethoughten me,
Since in his pate he hath no sense,
Give him the Art of Memory,
To be ta'en up from Misprepense.

XVI

And thirdly, for the livelihood
Of Master Robert aforesaid
(My kin, for God's sake, hold it good!)
Be money of my hauberk made
And (or most part thereof) outlaid,
Ere Easter pass, in purchasing
(Hard by St. Jacques) a shop and trade
For the poor witless lawyerling.

XVII

Item, my gloves and silken hood
My friend Jacques Cardon, I declare,
Shall have in fair free gift for good;
Also the acorns willows bear
And every day a capon fair
Or goose; likewise a tenfold vat
Of chalk-white wine, besides a pair
Or lawsuits, lest he wax too fat.

XVIII

Item, a leash of dogs I give
  To young René de Montigny;
And let Jehan Raguyer receive
  One hundred francs, shall levied be
  On all my goods. But soft; to me
Scant gain therefrom I apprehend:
  One should not strip one's own, perdie,
Nor over-ask it of one's friend.

XIX

Item, to Baron de Grigny
  The ward and keeping of Nygeon,
With six dogs more than Montigny,
  And Bicêtre, castle and donjon;
  And to that scurvy knave Changon,
A spy that holds him still in strife,
  Three strokes of withy well laid on
And prison-lodging all his life.

XX

Item, I leave Jacques Raguyer
  The 'Puppet' Cistern, peach and pear,
Perch, chickens, custards, night and day,
  At the Great Figtree choice of fare
  And eke the Fircone Tavern, where
He may sit, cloaked in cloth of frieze,
  Feet to the fire and back to chair,
And let the world wag at his ease.

XXI

Item, to John the foul of face
  And Peter Tanner I devise,
By way of gift, that baron's grace
  That punishes all felonies;
  To Fournier, my proctor wise,
Leather cut out for caps and shoes,
  That now at the cordwainer's lies,
For him these frosty days to use.

XXII

The Captain of the Watch, also,
  Shall have the Helmet, in full right;
And to the crimps, that cat-foot go,
  A-fumbling in the stalls by night,
  I leave two rubies, clear and bright,
The Lantern of La Pierre au Lait.
  'Deed, the Three Lilies have I might,
Haled they me to the Châtelet.

XXIII

To Pernet Marchand, eke, in fee,
  (Bastard of Bar by sobriquet)
For that a good-cheap man is he,
  I give three sheaves of straw or hay,
  Upon the naked floor to lay
And so the amorous trade to ply,
  For that he knows no other way
Or art to get his living by.

XXIV

Item, to Chollet I bequeath
And Loup, a duck, once in a way
Caught as of old the walls beneath
Upon the moat, towards end of day;
And each a friar's gown of gray —
Such as fall down beneath the knees —
My boots with uppers worn away,
And charcoal, wood, bacon and peas.

XXV

Item, this trust I do declare
For three poor children named below:
Three little orphans lone and bare,
That hungry and unshodden go
And naked to all winds that blow;
That they may be provided for
And sheltered from the rain and snow,
At least until this winter's o'er.

XXVI

To Colin Laurens, Jehan Moreau
And Girard Gossain, having ne'er
A farthing's worth of substance, no,
Nor kith nor kindred anywhere,
I leave, at option, each a share
Of goods or else four blanks once told.
Full merrily they thus shall fare,
Poor silly souls, when they are old.

XXVII

Item, my right of nomination
  Holden of the University,
I leave, by way of resignation,
  To rescue from adversity
  Poor clerks that of this city be,—
Hereunder named, for very ruth
  That thereunto incited me,
Seeing them naked all as Truth.

XXVIII

Their names are Thibault de Vitry
  And Guillaume Cotin — peaceable
Poor wights, that humble scholars be.
  Latin they featly speak and spell
  And at the lectern sing right well.
I do devise to them in fee
  (Till better fortune with them dwell)
A rent-charge on the pillory.

XXIX

Item, the Crozier of the street
  Of St. Antoine I do ordain,
Also a cue wherewith folk beat
  And every day full pot of Seine
  To those that in the trap are ta'en,
Bound hand and foot in close duresse;
  My mirror eke and grace to gain
The favours of the gaoleress.

XXX

Item, I leave the hospitals
  My curtains spun the spiders by;
And to the lodgers 'neath the stalls
  Each one a buffet on the eye
  And leave to tremble, as they lie,
Bruised, frozen, drenched, unshorn and lean,
  With hose shrunk half way up the thigh,
Gowns all to-clipt and woeful mien.

XXXI

Unto my barber I devise
  The ends and clippings of my hair;
Item, on charitable wise,
  I leave my old boots, every pair,
  Unto the cobbler and declare
My clothes the broker's, so these two
  May when I'm dead my leavings share,
For less than what they cost when new.

XXXII

Unto the begging Orders four,
  The nuns and sisters (tidbits they
Dainty and prime) I leave and store
  Of flawns, poults, capons, so they may
Break bread with both hands night and day
  And eke the Fifteen Signs declare:
Monks court our neighbours' wives, folk say,
  But that is none of my affair.

XXXIII

To John o' Guard, that grocer hight,
  The Golden Mortar I make o'er,
To grind his mustard in aright;
  Also a pestle from St. Maur;
  And unto him that goes before,
To lay one by the legs in quod,
  St. Anthony roast him full sore!
I'll leave him nothing else, by God.

XXXIV

Item, to Mairebeuf, as well
  As Nicholas de Louvieux,
Each one I leave a whole eggshell
  Full of old crowns and francs, and to
  The seneschal of Gouvieux,
Peter de Ronseville, no less;
  Such crowns I mean, to tell you true,
As the prince giveth for largesse.

XXXV

Finally, being here alone
  To-night and in good trim to write,
I heard the clock of the Sorbonne,
  That aye at nine o'clock of night
  Is wont the Angelus to smite:
Then I my task did intermit,
  That to our Lady mild I might
Do suit and service, as is fit.

XXXVI

This done, I half forgot myself,
What while I felt Dame Memory
Take in and lay upon her shelf
(The wit, as 'twere, being bound in me,
Though not for wind-bibbing, perdie,)
Her faculties collateral,
Th' opinative in each degree
And others intellectual.

XXXVII

And on likewise th' estimative,
— Whereby prosperity we gain, —
Similative and formative,
By whose disorder folk remain
Oft lunatic, to wit, insane,
From month to month; which aforesaid
I mind me often and again
In Aristotle to have read.

XXXVIII

Then did the sensitive upleap
And gave the cue to fantasy,
That roused the organs all from sleep,
But held the sovereign faculty
Still in suspense for lethargy
And pressure of oblivion,
Which had dispread itself in me,
To show the senses' union.

XXXIX

Then, when my senses in due course
  Grew calm and understanding clear,
I thought to finish my discourse,
  But found my inkpot frozen sheer
  And candle out, nor far nor near
Fire might I find, so must of need,
  All muffled up for warmer cheer,
Get me to sleep and end my rede.

XL

Done at the season aforesaid
  Of the right well-renowned Villon,
Who eats nor white nor oaten bread,
  Black as a malkin, shrunk and wan.
  Tents and pavilions every one
He's left to one or t'other friend;
  All but a little pewter's gone,
That will, ere long, come to an end.

Here Endeth the Lesser Testament of
Master François Villon

THE GREATER TESTAMENT

Here Beginneth the Greater Testament of Master François Villon

I

IN the year thirty of my age,
Wherein I've drunk so deep of shame,
Neither all fool nor yet all sage,
For all my misery and blame —
Which latter all upon me came
Through Bishop Thibault d'Aussigny:
(If bishop such an one folk name;
At all events, he's none for me:

II

He's nor my bishop nor my lord;
I hold of him nor land nor fee,
Owe him nor homage nor accord,
Am nor his churl nor beast, perdie).
A summer long he nourished me
Upon cold water and dry bread;
God do by him as he by me,
Whom passing scurvily he fed.

III

If any go about to say
  I do miscall him — I say no:
I wrong him not in any way,
  If one aread me rightly. Lo!
  Here's all I say, nor less nor mo;
If he had mercy on my dole,
  May Christ in heaven like mercy show
Unto his body and his soul!

IV

And if he wrought me pain and ill
  More than herein I do relate,
God of His grace to him fulfil
  Like measure and proportionate!
  But the Church bids us not to hate,
But to pray rather for our foes:
  I'll own I'm wrong and leave his fate
To God that all things can and knows.

V

And pray for him I will, to boot,
  By Master Cotard's soul I swear!
But soft: 'twill then be but by rote;
  I'm ill at reading; such a prayer
  I'll say for him as Picards' were.
(If what I mean he do not know —
  Ere 'tis too late to learn it there —
To Lille or Douai let him go.)

VI

Yet, if he needs must have't that I
Should, willy nilly, for him pray,
(Through I proclaim it not on high)
'As I'm a chrisom man, his way
He e'en shall get; but, sooth to say,
When I the Psalter ope for him,
I take the seventh verse alway
Of the psalm called "Deus laudem."

VII

I DO implore God's blessèd Son,
To whom I turn in every need,
So haply my poor orison
Find grace with Him—from whom indeed
Body and soul I hold — who's freed
Me oft from blame and evil chance.
Praised be our Lady and her Seed
And Louis the good King of France!

VIII

Whom God with Jacob's luck endow,
And glory of great Solomon!
Of doughtiness he has enow,
In sooth, and of dominion.
In all the lands the sun shines on,
In this our world of night and day,
God grant his fame and memory wonne
As long as lived Methusaleh!

IX

May twelve fair sons perpetuate
His royal lineage, one and all
As valorous as Charles the Great,
Conceived in matrix conjugal,
As doughty as Saint Martial!
The late Lord Dauphin fare likewise;
No worser fortune him befall
Than this and after, Paradise!

X

FEELING my self upon the wane,
Even more in goods than body spent,
Whilst my full senses I retain,
What little God to me hath sent
(For on no other have I leant)
I have set down of my last will
This very stable Testament,
Alone and irrevocable.

XI

Written in the same year, sixty-one,
Wherein the good king set me free
From the dour prison of Mehun
And so to life recovered me:
Whence I to him shall bounden be
As long as life in me fail not:
I'm his till death; assuredly,
Good deeds should never be forgot.

THE GREATER TESTAMENT

Here Beginneth Villon to Enter upon Matter full of Erudition and of Fair Knowledge

XII

NOW is it true that, after years
  Of anguish and of sorrowing,
Travail and toil and groans and tears
  And many a weary wondering,
  Trouble hath wrought in me to bring
To point each shifting sentiment,
  Teaching me many another thing
Than Averrhöes his Comment.

XIII

However, at my trials' worst,
  When wandering in the desert ways,
God, who the Emmäus pilgrims erst
  Did comfort, as the Gospel says,
  Showed me a certain resting-place
And gave me gift of hope no less;
  Though vile the sinner be and base,
Nothing He hates save stubbornness.

XIV

Sinned have I oft, as well I know;
  But God my death doth not require,
But that I turn from sin and so
  Live righteously and shun hellfire.
  Whether one by sincere desire
Or counsel turn unto the Lord,
  He sees and casting off His ire,
Grace to repentance doth accord.

XV

And as of its own motion shows,
  Ev'n in the very first of it,
The noble Romaunt of the Rose,
  Youth to the young one should remit,
  So manhood do mature the wit.
And there, alack! the song says sooth:
  They that such snares for me have knit
Would have me die in time of youth.

XVI

If for my death the common weal
  Might anywise embetterred be,
Death my own hand to me should deal
  As felon, so God 'stablish me!
  But unto none, that I can see,
Hindrance I do, alive or dead;
  The hills, for one poor wight, perdie,
Will not be stirred out of their stead.

XVII

WHILOM, when Alexander reigned,
  A man that hight Diomedes
Before the Emporer was arraigned,
  Bound hand and foot, like as one sees
  A thief. A skimmer of the seas
Of those that course it far and nigh
  He was, and so, as one of these,
They brought him to be doomed to die.

XVIII

The emperor bespoke him thus:
  'Why art thou a sea-plunderer?'
The other, no wise timorous:
  'Why dost thou call me plunderer, sir?
  Is it, perchance, because I ear
Upon so mean a bark the sea?
  Could I but arm me with thy gear,
I would be emperor like to thee.

XIX

'What wouldst thou have? From sorry Fate,
  That uses me with such despite
As I on no wise can abate,
  Arises this my evil plight.
  Let me find favour in thy sight
And have in mind the common saw:
  In penury is little right;
Necessity knows no man's law.'

XX

Whenas the emperor to his suit
  Had hearkened, much he wonderèd;
And 'I thy fortune will commute
  From bad to good,' to him he said;
  And did. Thenceforward Diomed
Wronged none, but was a true man aye.
  Thus have I in Valerius read,
Of Rome styled Greatest in his day.

XXI

If God had granted me to find
  A king of like greatheartedness,
That had fair fate to me assigned,
  Stooped I thenceforward to excess
  Or ill, I would myself confess
Worthy to die by fire at stake.
  Necessity makes folk transgress
And want drives wolven from the brake.

XXII

MY time of youth I do bewail,
  That more than most lived merrily,
Until old age 'gan me assail,
  For youth had passed unconsciously.
  It wended not afoot from me,
Nor yet on horseback. Ah, how then?
  It fled away all suddenly
And never will return again.

XXIII

It's gone, and I am left behind,
  Poor both in knowledge and in wit,
Black as a berry, drear and dwined,
  Coin, land and goods, gone every whit;
  Whilst those by kindred to me knit,
The due of Nature all forgot,
  To disavow me have seen fit,
For lack of pelf to pay the scot.

XXIV

Yet have I not my substance spent
In wantoning or gluttony
Nor thorow love incontinent;
None is there can reproach it me,
Except he rue it bitterly;
I say it in all soothfastness —
Nor can you bate me of this plea —
Who's done no wrong should none confess.

XXV

True is it I have loved whilere
And willingly would love again:
But aching heart and paunch that ne'er
Doth half its complement contain,
The ways of Love allure in vain;
'Deed, none but those may play its game
Whose well-lined belly wags amain;
For the dance comes of the full wame.

XXVI

If in my time of youth, alack!
I had but studied and been sage
Nor wandered from the beaten track,
I had slept warm in my old age.
But what did I? As bird from cage,
I fled the schools; and now with pain,
In setting down this on the page,
My heart is like to cleave in twain.

XXVII

I have construed what Solomon
  Intended, with too much largesse,
When that he said, 'Rejoice, my son,
  In thy fair youth and lustiness:'
  But elsewhere speaks he otherguess;
'For youth and adolescence be'
  (These are his words, nor more nor less)
'But ignorance and vanity.'

XXVIII

Like as the loose threads on the loom,
  Whenas the weaver to them lays
The flaming tow, burn and consume,
  So that from ragged ends (Job says)
  The web is freed, — even so my days
Are gone a-wand'ring past recall.
  No more Fate's buffs nor her affrays
I fear, for death assuageth all.

XXIX

WHERE are the gracious gallants now
  That of old time I did frequent,
So fair of fashion and of show,
  In song and speech so excellent?
  Stark dead are some, their lives are spent;
There rests of them nor mark nor trace:
  May they in Heaven have content;
God keep the others of His grace!

XXX

Some, Christ-a-mercy, are become
  Masters and lords of high degree;
Some beg all naked and no crumb
  Of bread save in some window see;
  Some, having put on monkery,
Carthews, Celestines and what not,
  Shod, breeched like oysterfishers be;
Look you, how divers is their lot!

XXXI

God grant great lords to do aright,
  That live in luxury and ease!
We cannot aught to them requite,
  So will do well to hold our peace.
  But to the poor (like me), that cease
Never from want, God patience give!
  For that they need it; and not these,
That have the wherewithal to live, —

XXXII

That drink of noble wines and eat
  Fish, soups and sauces every day,
Pasties and flawns and roasted meat
  And eggs served up in many a way.
  Herein from masons differ they,
That with such toil their bread do earn:
  These need no cupbearer, folk say,
For each one pours out in his turn.

XXXIII

TO this digression I've been led,
That serves in nothing my intent.
I am no Court, empanellèd
For quittance or for punishment:
I am of all least diligent.
Praised be Christ! May each man's need
By me of Him have full content!
That which is writ is writ indeed.

XXXIV

So let that kite hang on the wall
And of more pleasing subjects treat;
For this finds favour not with all,
Being wearisome and all unsweet:
For poverty doth groan and greet,
Full of despite and strife alway;
Is apt to say sharp things in heat
Or think them, if it spare to say.

XXXV

POOR was I from my earliest youth,
Born of a poor and humble race:
My sire was never rich, in sooth,
Nor yet his grandfather Erace;
Want follows hard upon our trace
Nor on my forbears' tombs, I ween,
(Whose souls the love of God embrace!)
Are crowns or sceptres to be seen.

XXXVI

When I of poverty complain,
  Ofttimes my heart to me hath said,
'Man, wherefore murmur thus in vain?
  If thou hast no such plentihead
  As had Jacques Cœur, be comforted:
Better to live and rags to wear
  Than to have been a lord, and dead,
Rot in a splendid sepulchre.'

XXXVII

(Than to have been a lord! I say.
  Alas, no longer is he one;
As the Psalm tells of it, — today
  His place of men is all unknown.)
  As for the rest, affair 'tis none
Of mine, that but a sinner be:
  To theologians alone
The case belongs, and not to me.

XXXVIII

For I am not, as well I know,
  An angel's son, that crowned with light
Among the starry heavens doth go:
  My sire is dead — God have his spright!
  His body's buried out of sight.
I know my mother too must die —
  She knows it too, poor soul, aright —
And soon her son by her must lie.

XXXIX

I know full well that rich and poor,
  Villein and noble, high and low,
Laymen and clerks, gracious and dour,
  Wise men and foolish, sweet of show
  Or foul of favour, dames that go
Ruffed and rebatoed, great or small,
  High-tired or hooded, Death (I know)
Without exception seizes all.

XL

Paris or Helen though one be,
  Who dies, in pain and drearihead,
For lack of breath and blood dies he,
  His gall upon his heart is shed;
  Then doth he sweat, God knows how dread
A sweat, and none there is to allay
  His ills, child, kinsman, in his stead,
None will go bail for him that day.

XLI

Death makes him shiver and turn pale,
  Sharpens his nose and swells his veins,
Puffs up his throat, makes his flesh fail,
  His joints and nerves greatens and strains.
  Fair women's bodies, soft as skeins
Of silk, so tender, smooth and rare,
  Must you too suffer all these pains?
Ay, or alive to heaven fare.

Ballad of Old-Time Ladies

I

TELL me where, in what land of shade,
Bides fair Flora of Rome, and where
Are Thaïs and Archipiade,
Cousins-german of beauty rare,
And Echo, more than mortal fair,
That, when one calls by river-flow,
Or marish, answers out of the air?
But what is become of last year's snow?

II

Where did the learn'd Heloïsa vade,
For whose sake Abelard might not spare
(Such dole for love on him was laid)
Manhood to lose and a cowl to wear?
And where is the queen who willed whilere
That Buridan, tied in a sack, should go
Floating down Seine from the turret-stair?
But what is become of last year's snow?

III

Blanche, too, the lily-white queen, that made
Sweet music as if she a siren were;
Broad-foot Bertha; and Joan the maid,
The good Lorrainer, the English bare
Captive to Rouen and burned her there;
Beatrix, Eremburge, Alys, — lo!
Where are they, Virgin debonair?
But what is become of last year's snow?

ENVOI

Prince, you may question how they fare
This week, or liefer this year, I trow:
Still shall the answer this burden bear,
But what is become of last year's snow?

BALLAD OF OLD-TIME LORDS

No. 1

I

THERE is Calixtus, third of the name,
That died in the purple whiles ago,
Four years since he to the tiar came?
And the King of Aragon, Alfonso?
The Duke of Bourbon, sweet of show,
And the Duke Arthur of Brittaine?
And Charles the Seventh, the Good? Heigho!
But where is the doughty Charlemaine?

II

Likewise the King of Scots, whose shame
Was the half of his face (or folk say so),
Vermeil as amethyst held to the flame,
From chin to forehead all of a glow?
The King of Cyprus, of friend and foe
Renowned; and the gentle King of Spain,
Whose name, God 'ield me, I do not know?
But where is the doughty Charlemaine?

III

Of many more might I ask the same,
Who are but dust that the breezes blow;
But I desist, for none may claim
To stand against Death, that lays all low.
Yet one more question before I go:
Where is Lancelot, King of Behaine?
And where are his valiant ancestors, trow?
But where is the doughty Charlemaine?

ENVOI

Where is Du Guesclin, the Breton prow?
Where Auvergne's Dauphin and where again
The late good duke of Alençon? Lo!
But where is the doughty Charlemaine?

Ballad of Old-Time Lords
No. 2.

I

THERE are the holy apostles gone,
Alb-clad and amice-tired and stoled
With the sacred tippet and that alone,
Wherewith, when he waxeth overbold,
The foul fiend's throttle they take and hold?
All must come to the self-same bay;
Sons and servants, their days are told:
The wind carries their like away.

II

Where is he now that held the throne
Of Constantine with the bands of gold?
And the King of France, o'er all kings known
For grace and worship that was extolled,
Who convents and churches manifold
Built for God's service? In their day
What of the honour they had? Behold,
The wind carries their like away.

III

Where are the champions every one,
The Dauphins, the counsellors young and old?
The barons of Salins, Dôl, Dijon,
Vienne, Grenoble? They all are cold.
Or take the folk under their banners enrolled,
Pursuivants, trumpeters, heralds, (hey!
How they fed of the fat and the flagon trolled!)
The wind carries their like away.

Envoi

Princes to death are all foretold,
Even as the humblest of their array:
Whether they sorrow or whether they scold,
The wind carries their like away.

XLII

SINCE, then, popes, princes great and small,
That in queens' wombs conceivèd were,
Are dead and buried, one and all,
And other heads their crownals wear,
Shall Death to smite poor me forbear?
Shall I not die? Ay, if God will.
So that of life I have my share,
An honest death I take not ill.

XLIII

This world is not perpetual,
Deem the rich robber what he may:
Under death's whittle are we all.
Old men to heart this comfort lay,
That had repute in their young day
Of being quick at jest and flout, —
Whom folk, if, now that they are gray,
They should crack jokes, as fools would scout.

XLIV

Now haply must they beg their bread,
  (For need thereto doth them constrain;)
Each day they wish that they were dead;
  Sorrow so straitens heart and brain
  That, did not fear of God restrain,
Some dreadful deed they might essay;
  Nay, whiles they take His law in vain
And with themselves they make away.

XLV

For if in youth men spoke them fair,
  Now do they nothing that is right;
(Old apes, alas! ne'er pleasing were;
  No trick of theirs but brings despite.)
  If they are dumb, for fear of slight,
Folk them for worn-out dotards hold;
  Speak they, their silence folk invite,
Saying they pay with others' gold.

XLVI

So with poor women that are old
  And have no vivers in the chest,
When that young wenches they behold
  Fare at their ease and well addrest,
  They ask God why before the rest
Themselves were born. They cry and shout:
  God answers not; for second best
He'd come off at a scolding-bout.

The Complaint of the Fair Helm-Maker Grown Old

I

Methought I heard the fair complain
— The fair that erst was helm-maker —
And wish herself a girl again.
After this fashion did I hear:
'Alack! old age, felon and drear,
Why hast so early laid me low?
What hinders but I slay me here
And so at one stroke end my woe?

II

'Thou hast undone the mighty thrall
In which my beauty held for me
Clerks, merchants, churchmen, one and all:
For never man my face might see,
But would have given his all for fee, —
Without a thought of his abuse, —
So I should yield him at his gree
What churls for nothing now refuse.

III

'I did to many me deny
(Therein I showed but little guile)
For love of one right false and sly,
Whom without stint I loved erewhile.
Whomever else I might bewile,
I loved him *well, sorry or glad:*
But he to me was harsh and vile
And loved me but for what I had.

IV

'Ill as he used me, and howe'er
Unkind, I loved him none the less:
Even had he made me faggots bear,
One kiss from him or one caress,
And I forgot my every stress.
The rogue! 'twas ever thus the same
With him. It brought me scant liesse:
And what is left me? Sin and shame.

V

'Now is he dead this thirty year,
And I'm grown old and worn and gray:
When I recall the days that were
And think of what I am to-day
And when me naked I survey
And see my body shrunk to nought,
Withered and shrivelled, — wellaway!
For grief I am well-nigh distraught.

VI

'Where is that clear and crystal brow?
Those eyebrows arched and golden hair?
And those bright eyes, where are they now,
Wherewith the wisest ravished were?
The little nose so straight and fair;
The tiny tender perfect ear;
Where is the dimpled chin and where
The pouting lips so red and clear?

VII

'The shoulders gent and strait and small;
Round arms and white hands delicate;
The little pointed breasts withal;
The haunches plump and high and straight,
Right fit for amorous debate;
Wide hips * * *
* * * * *
* * * * *

VIII

'Brows wrinkled sore and tresses gray;
The brows all fall'n and dim the eyne
That wont to charm men's hearts away;
The nose that was so straight and fine,
Now bent and swerved from beauty's line;
Chin peaked, ears furred and hanging down;
Faded the face and quenched its shine
And lips mere bags of loose skin grown.

IX

'Such is the end of human grace:
The arms grown short and hands all thrawn;
The shoulders bowed out of their place;
The breasts all shrivelled up and gone;
The haunches like the paps withdrawn;
The thighs no longer like to thighs,
Withered and mottled all like brawn,
* * * * *

X

'And so the litany goes round,
Lamenting the good time gone by,
Among us crouched upon the ground,
Poor silly hags, to-huddled by
A scanty fire of hempstalks dry,
Kindled in haste and soon gone out;
(We that once held our heads so high!)
So all take turn and turn about.'

The Doctrine of the Fair Helm-Maker to the Light o' Loves

I

Now think on't, Nell the glover fair,
That wont my scholar once to be,
And you, Blanche Slippermaker there,
Your case in mine I'd have you see:
Look all to right and left take ye;
Forbear no man; for trulls that bin
Old have nor course nor currency,
No more than money that's called in.

II

You, Sausage-huckstress debonair,
That dance and trip it brisk and free,
And Guillemette Upholstress, there,
Look you transgress not Love's decree:
Soon must you shut up shop, perdie;
Soon old you'll grow, faded and thin,
Worth, like some old priest's visnomy,
No more than money that's called in.

III

Jenny the hatter, have a care
Lest some false lover hamper thee;
And Kitty Spurmaker, beware;
Deny no man that proffers fee;
For girls that are not bright o' blee
Men's scorn and not their service win:
Foul eld gets neither love nor gree,
No more than money that's called in.

ENVOI

Wenches, give ear and list (quo' she)
Wherefore I weep and make this din;
'Tis that there is no help for me,
No more than money that's called in.

XLVII

THIS lesson unto them gives she,
The bellibone of days gone by.
Ill said or well, worth what they be,
These things enregistered have I
By my clerk Fremin (giddy fry!),
Being as composed as well I may.
I curse him if he make me lie:
Like clerk, like master, people say.

XLVIII

Nay, the great danger well I see
  Wherein a man in love doth fall . . .
Suppose that some lay blame on me
  For this speech, saying, 'Listen, all:
  If this do make you love miscall,
The tricks of wantons named above,
  Your doubts are too chimerical,
For these are women light o' love.

XLIX

'For if they love not but for gain,
  Folk do but love them for a day;
In sooth, they roundly love all men,
  And when purse weeps, then are they gay:
  Not one but questeth after prey.
But honest men, so God me spare,
  With honest women will alway
Have dealing, and not otherwhere.'

L

I put it that one thus devise:
  He doth in nothing me gainsay;
In sooth, I think no otherwise,
  And well I ween that one should aye
  In worthy place love's homage pay.
But were not these, of whom I rhyme
  (God wot) and reason all the day,
Once honest women aforetime?

LI

Aye, they *were* honest, in good sooth,
Without reproach or any blame;
But, in her first and prime of youth,
Ere she had loren her good name,
Each of these women thought no shame
To take some man for her desire,
Laic or clerk, to quench love's flame,
That burns worse than St. Anthony's fire.

LII

Of these, as Love ordains, they made
Their lovers, as appeareth well:
Each loved her gallant in the shade
And none else had with her to mell.
But this first love's not durable;
For she, that loved but one erewhen,
Soon tires of him to her that fell
And sets herself to love all men.

LIII

What moves them thus? I do opine,
Without their honour gainsaying,
That 'tis their nature feminine,
Which tends to cherish everything:
No other reason with the thing
Will rhyme, but if this saw it be,
That everywhere folk say and sing:
Six workmen do more work than three.

LIV

The shuttlecock light lovers be;
  Their ladie-loves the battledore.
This is love's way in verity:
  Spite clips and kisses, evermore
  By constancy it sets small store.
For everyone this wise complains
  Of dogs and horses, love and war:
Each pleasure's bought with fifty pains.

Double Ballad to the Like Purport

I

Serve love and ladies day and night,
  Frequenting feasts and revelries;
You'll get nor profit nor delight,
  But only broken heads and sighs;
  Light loves make asses of the wise,
As witness Solomon, God wot;
  And Samson thereby lost his eyes.
Happy is he who knows them not.

II

Orpheus, the minstrel fair and wight,
That fluted in such dulcet guise,
Did hardly 'scape the deadly bite
Of Cerberus, in love's emprize;
Narcissus did so idolize
His own fair favour that (poor sot)
He drowned himself, as none denies.
Happy is he who knows them not.

III

Sardana also, the good knight,
That conquered Creté, did disguise
Him as a wench and so bedight,
Span among maids; and on like wise
David the king, for palliardize,
The fear of God awhile forgot
At sight of white well-shapen thighs.
Happy is he who knows them not.

IV

And David's son, that Ammon hight,
Deflowered his sister, for with lies,
Feigning desire for manchets white,
Incest most foul he did devise;
And Herod (history testifies)
Paid with John Baptist's head the scot
For a girl's dancing deviltries.
Happy is he who knows them not.

V

And even I, poor silly wight,
Was beaten as linen is that lies
In washers' tubs for bats to smite;
And who gat me this sour surprise
But Vaucel's Kate, the cockatrice?
And Noël, too, his good share got
Of cuffs at those festivities.
Happy is he who knows them not.

VI

And yet before a young man might
Be brought to leave this merchandise,
Well might you burn him bolt upright,
Witch-like that on a besom flies.
Above all, wenches doth he prize:
But there's no trusting them a jot;
Blonde or brunette, this rhyme applies,
Happy is he who knows them not.

LV

IF she whom I did serve of old
So whole of heart and loyally,
For whom I wasted years and gold
And only won much misery,—
If she at first had told to me
(But no, alas!) her true intent,
I had essayed assuredly
To cast off my entanglement.

LVI

Whatever I to her would say
She always ready was to hear
Nor ever said me ay or nay;
Nay more, she suffered me draw near,
Sit close and whisper in her ear,
And so with me played fast and loose
And let me tell my all to her,
Intending only my abuse.

LVII

She fooled me, being in her power;
For she did make me think, alas!
That one was other, ashes flour,
That a felt hat a mortar was;
Of rusty iron, that 'twas brass;
Of double ace, that it was trey.
So would she make a man an ass
And lead him by the nose alway.

LVIII

On this wise did she me persuade,
Till heaven a brazen canopy,
The clouds of calfskin to be made
And morning evening seemed to be;
Ill beer new wine, a hank of three
A halter, navews cabbage-plant,
A sow a windmill was for me
And a fat priest a pursuivant.

LIX

THUS Love hath wrought me to deceive
And bandied me from cold to hot:
There is no man, I do believe,
Were he as cunning as I'm not,
But he would leave with Love for scot
Pourpoint and hose, and fare as I,
That everywhere am called, God wot,
The lover flouted and laid by.

LX

Love now and wenches I forswear;
War to the knife to them I mete;
For death (and not a rap they care)
Through them treads hard upon my feet.
I've put my lute beneath the seat;
Lovers no longer I'll ensue;
If ever I with them did treat,
I'm none henceforward of their crew.

LXI

'Gainst Love my standard I've unfurled;
Let those that love him follow still;
I'm his no longer in this world;
For I intend to do my will.
Wherefore if any take it ill
That I Love venture to impeach,
Let this content him, will or nill,
'A dying man is free of speech.'

LXII

I FEEL the droughts of death draw nigh;
  Gobbets of phlegm, as white as snow
And big as tennis-balls, spit I;
  By token Jehanneton no mo'
  Doth me for squire and servant owe,
But for a worn-out rook. Ah, well!
  I have the voice and air, I know;
Yet am I but a cockerel.

LXIII

Thanks be to God and Jacques Thibault,
  Who made me drink of water cold
So much within a dungeon low
  And also chew gags manifold.
  When on these things I think of old,
I pray for him, . . . et reliqua;
  God give him . . . what at heart I hold
To be his due . . . et cætera.

LXIV

Yet do I mean no ill to him
  Or his lieutenant; nought but well
Of his official eke I deem,
  Who's merry and conformable.
  Nor with the rest have I to mell,
Save Master Robert . . . Great and small,
  As God loves Lombards, sooth to tell,
I love the whole lot, one and all.

LXV

I DO remember (so God please)
  In the year '56 I made,
Departing, sundry legacies,
  That some without my leave or aid
  To call my Testament essayed.
(Their pleasure 'twas, and theirs alone.
  But what? Is't not in common said
That none is master of his own?)

LXVI

And should it happen that of these
  Some peradventure be unpaid,
I order, after my decease,
  That of my heirs demand be made.
  Who are they? If it should be said;
To Moreau, Provins and Turgis
  By letters sealed I have conveyed
Even to the mattress under me.

LXVII

Towards the Bastard de la Barre
  Compassion still at heart I bear.
Beside his straw, (and these words are
  His old bequest, though more it were,
  Not to revoke) I do declare
I give him my old mats for seat:
  Well will they serve him to sit square
And keep him steady on his feet.

LXVIII

In fine, but one more word I'll say
  Or ever I begin to test:
Before my clerk, who hears alway
  (If he's awake), I do protest
  That knowingly I have opprest
No man in this my ordinance:
  Nor will I make it manifest
Except unto the realm of France.

LXIX

I feel my heart that's growing dead
  Nor breath for further prate have I.
Fremin, sit down close to my bed,
  And look that no one us espy.
  Take pen, ink, paper, by and by
And what I say write thou therein;
  Then have it copied far and nigh:
And this is how I do begin.

Here Beginneth Villon to Test

LXX

In the eternal Father's name
  And His that's present in the Host,
One with the Father and the same,
  Together with the Holy Ghost, —
  [By whom was saved what Adam lost,
And in the light of heaven arrayed,
  (Who best believes this merits most,)
Dead sinners little gods were made:

LXXI

Dead were they, body and soul as well,
  Doomed to eternal punishment:
Flesh rotted, soul in flames of hell,
  What way soe'er their lives were spent.
  But I except, in my intent,
Prophets and Patriarchs all and sheer:
  Meseems they never could have brent
With over-muckle heat arear.

LXXII

If any ask, 'What maketh thee
  With questions such as this to mell,
That art not of theology
  Doctor, or therein capable?'
  'Tis Jesus His own parable,
Touching the rich man that did lie,
  Buried in burning flames of hell,
And saw the leper in the sky.

LXXIII

If he had seen the lazar burn,
  He had not asked him, well I wot,
To give him water or in turn
  To cool his dry and parchèd throat.
  There folk will have a scurvy lot
That to buy drink their hosen sell;
  Since drink is there so hardly got,
God save us all from thirst in hell!]

LXXIV

Now, in God's name and with His aid
And in our Lady's name no less,
Let without sin this say be said
By me grown haggard for duresse.
If I nor light nor fire possess,
God hath ordained it for my sin;
But as to this and other stress
I will leave talking and begin.

LXXV

First, my poor soul (which God befriend)
Unto the blessed Trinity
And to our Lady I commend,
The fountain of Divinity,
Beseeching all the charity
Of the nine orders of the sky,
That it of them transported be
Unto the throne of God most high.

LXXVI

Item, my body I ordain
Unto the earth, our grandmother:
Thereof the worms will have small gain;
Hunger hath worn it many a year.
Let it be given straight to her;
From earth it came, to earth apace
Returns; all things, except I err,
Do gladly turn to their own place.

LXXVII

Item, to Guillaume de Villon, —
  (My more than father, who indeed
To me more tenderness hath shown
  Than mothers to the babes they feed,
  Who me from many a scrape hath freed
And now of me hath scant liesse, —
  I do entreat him, bended-kneed,
He leave me to my present stress, —)

LXXVIII

I do bequeath my library, —
  The "Devil's Crake" Romaunt, whilere
By Messire Guy de Tabarie, —
  A right trustworthy man, — writ fair.
  Beneath a bench it lies somewhere,
In quires. Though crudely it be writ,
  The matter's so beyond compare
That it redeems the style of it.

LXXIX

I give the ballad following
  To my good mother, — who of me
(God knows!) hath had much sorrowing, —
  That she may worship our Ladie:
  I have none other sanctuary
Whereto, when overcome with dole,
  I may for help and comfort flee;
Nor hath my mother, poor good soul!

Ballad That Villon Made at the Request of his Mother, Wherewithal to do her Homage to Our Lady

I

Lady of Heaven, Regent of the earth,
Empress of all the infernal marshes fell,
Receive me, Thy poor Christian, 'spite my dearth,
In the fair midst of Thine elect to dwell:
Albeit my lack of grace I know full well;
For that Thy grace, my Lady and my Queen,
Aboundeth more than all my misdemean,
Withouten which no soul of all that sigh
May merit Heaven. 'Tis sooth I say, for e'en
In this belief I will to live and die.

II

Say to Thy Son I am His, — that by His birth
And death my sins be all redeemable, —
As Mary of Egypt's dole He changed to mirth
And eke Theophilus', to whom befell
Quittance of Thee, albeit (So men tell)
To the foul fiend he had contracted been.
Assoilzie me, that I may have no teen,
Maid, that without breach of virginity
Didst bear our Lord that in the Host is seen.
In this belief I will to live and die.

III

A poor old wife I am, and little worth:
Nothing I know, nor letter aye could spell:
Where is the church to worship I fare forth,
I see Heaven limned, with harps and lutes, and Hell,
Where damned folk seethe in fire unquenchable.
One doth me fear, the other joy serene:
Grant I may have the joy, O Virgin clean,
To whom all sinners lift their hands on high,
Made whole in faith through Thee their go-between.
In this belief I will to live and die.

Envoi

Thou didst conceive, Princess most bright of sheen,
Jesus the Lord, that hath nor end nor mean,
Almighty, that, departing Heaven's demesne
To succour us, put on our frailty,
Offering to death His sweet of youth and green:
Such as He is, our Lord He is, I ween!
In this belief I will to live and die.

LXXX

Item, upon my dearest Rose
  Nor heart nor liver I bestow:
Thereat she would turn up her nose,
  Albeit she hath coin eno', —
  A great silk purse, as well I know,
Stuffed full of crowns, both new and old.
  May he be hanged, or high or low,
That leaves her silver aught or gold!

LXXXI

For she without me has enow:
  To me it matters not a jot:
My salad days are past, I trow;
  No more desire in me is hot:
  All that I leave unto Michot,
That was surnamed the good gallant —
  Or rather to his heirs; God wot
At St. Satur his tomb's extant.

LXXXII

This notwithstanding, to acquit
  Me toward Love rather than her,
(For never had I any whit
  Of hope from her: I cannot hear,
  Nor do I care, if a deaf ear
To all she turns as well as me;
  But by Saint Maudlin I aver,
Therein but laughing-stuff I see.)

LXXXIII

This ballad shall she have of me,
  That all with rhymes in R doth end:
Who shall be bearer? Let me see:
  Pernet the Bastard I will send,
  Provided, if, as he doth wend,
He come across my pugnosed frow,
  This question he to her commend;
'Foul Wanton, wherefrom comest thou?'

Ballad of Villon to his Mistress

I

False beauty, that hath cost me many a sigh;
  Fair-seeming sweetness in effect how sour;
Love-liking, harder far than steel, that I
  May sister name of my defeasance dour;
  Traitorous charms, that did my heart devour;
Pride, that puts folk to death with secret scorn;
  Pitiless eyes, will rigour ne'er allow her,
Ere worse betide, to succour one forlorn?

II

Well were it for me elsewhere to apply
  For succour: well I know that in her bower
The load of love I never shall lay by;
  Sure 'twere no shame to fly from such a stoure.
  Haro! I cry—both great and small implore.
But what avails me? I shall die outworn,
  Without blow struck, excepting pity bow her,
Ere worse betide, to succour one forlorn.

III

A time will come to wither and make dry,
Yellow and pale, thy beauty's full-blown flower:
Then should I laugh, if yet my heart were high.
But no, alas! I then shall have no power
To laugh, being old in that disastrous hour.
Wherefore drink deep, before the river's frorne;
Neither refuse, whilst grace is still thy dower,
Ere worse betide, to succour one forlorn.

ENVOI

Great God of Love, all lovers' governour,
Ill falleth thy disfavour to be borne:
True hearts are bound, by Christ our Saviour,
Ere worse betide, to succour one forlorn.

LXXXIV

Item, to Master Ythier,
To whom I left my sword of yore,
I give (to set to song) this lay,
Containing verses half a score;
Being a De profundis for
His love of once upon a day:
Her name I must not tell you, or
He'd hate me like the deuce alway.

Lay or Rather Roundel

Death, of thy rigour I complain,
That hast my lady torn from me
And will not yet contented be,
Save from me too all strength be ta'en,
For languishment of heart and brain.
What harm did she in life to thee,
Death?

One heart we had betwixt us twain;
Which being dead, I too must dree
Death, or, like carven saints we see
In choir, sans life to live be fain,
Death!

LXXXV

Item, a new bequest I will
To make to Master Jehan Cornu;
Who in my need hath helped me still
And done me favours not a few;
Wherefore the garden him unto
I give that Peter Bobignon
Leased me, so but he hang anew
The door and fix the gable on.

LXXXVI

I there did lose, for lack of door,
  A hone and handle of a hoe:
Thenceforward, falcons half a score
  Had not there caught a lark, I trow.
  The hostel's safe, but keep it so.
I put a hook there in sign-stead:
  God grant the robber nought but woe,
A bloody night and earthen bed!

LXXXVII

Item, considering that the wife
  Of Master Peter St. Amant
(Yet if therein be blame or strife,
  God grant her grace and benison)
  Me as a beggar looks upon,
For the White Horse that will not stir,
  A Mare, and for the Mule, anon,
A Brick-red Ass I give to her.

LXXXVIII

Item, I give unto Denis
  (Elect of Paris) Hesselin,
Of wine of Aulnis, from Turgis
  Taken at my peril, casks fourteen.
  If he to drink too much begin,
That so his wit and sense decline,
  Let them put water therewithin:
Many a good house is lost by wine.

LXXXIX

Item, upon my advocate,
Whose name is Guillaume Charriau, —
Though he's a chapman by estate,
My sword, (without the scabbard, though,)
And a gold royal I bestow,
In sous, to swell his purse's space,
Levied on those that come and go
Within the Temple cloister-place.

XC

Item, my proctor Fournier
Shall handfuls four — for all his pain
And travail for me night and day, —
Have from my purse; for suits amain
He hath ywrought to gar me gain, —
Just ones, by Jesus be it said!
Even as the judgment did ordain:
The best of rights has need of aid.

XCI

Item, to Jamy Raguyer
The Muckle Mug in Grève give I,
Provided always that he pay
Four placks for livery of it; ay,
Even though what covers calf and thigh
To make the money up sell he
And fare each morn bare-legged thereby
Unto the Fir-cone Hostelry.

XCII

Item, for Mairebeuf (I vow)
 And Nicholas de Louviers,
I give them neither ox nor cow,
 For drovers neither herds are they,
 But folk that ride a-hawking may,
(Think not I'm making mock of you)
 Partridge and plover night and day
To fake from Mother Maschicoue.

XCIII

Item, if Turgis come to me,
 I'll pay him fairly for his wine:
But soft; if where I lodge find he,
 He'll have more wit than any nine.
 I leave to him that vote of mine,
As citizens of Paris see:
 If sometimes I speak Poitevine,
Two Poitou ladies taught it me.

XCIV

Damsels they were, both fair and free,
 Abiding at St. Generou,
Hard by St. Julian of Brittany
 Or in the Marches of Poitou.
 Natheless, I tell you not for true
Where all their days and nights they dwell;
 I am not fool enough, look you,
My loves to all the world to tell.

XCV

Item, Jehan Raguyer I give
(That's Sergeant, — of the Twelve, indeed)
Each day, so long as he shall live,
A ramakin, that he may feed
Thereon and stay his stomach's need;
(From Bailly's table be it brought).
Let him not ask for wine or mead,
But at the fountain quench his drought.

XCVI

Item, I give the Prince of Fools
A master-fool, Michault du Four,
The jolliest jester in the Schools,
That sings so well 'Ma douce amour.'
With that of him I'll speak no more.
Brief, if he's but in vein some jot,
He's a right royal fool, be sure,
And still is witty, where he's not.

XCVII

Item, I give unto a pair
Of sergeants here whose names I've set —
For that they're honest folk and fair —
Denis Richer and Jehan Vallette,
A tippet each or bandelet,
To hang their hats of felt unto;
I mean *foot*-sergeants, for as yet
Nought with the horse have I to do.

XCVIII

Item, to Pernet I remit
  For that he is a cogging jack,
(The Bastard of La Barre, to wit,)
  Three loaded dice or else a pack
  Of cheating cards, marked on the back,
To arms, in lieu of bend. But what?
  If he be heard to fyst or crack,
The quartan ague catch the sot!

XCIX

Item, I order that Chollet
  No longer hoop or saw or plane
Or head up barrels all the day.
  Let him his tools change for a cane
  (Or Lyons sword), so he retain
The cooper's mall; for, sooth to tell,
  Though noise and strife to hate he feign,
At heart he loves them but too well.

C

Item, I give to Jehan le Loup —
  For that he's lean and lank and spent,
(Though good-cheap man and comrade true)
  And Chollet too, is slow of scent,
  A setter, young, but excellent,
(No chick he'll miss afield, I trow)
  And a long cloak, 'gainst 'spial meant
To cover them from top to toe.

CI

Item, to Duboys, goldworker,
An hundred cloves, both head and tail,
Of Saracenic zinziber;
Not cases therewithal to nail
* * * * *
* * * * *
* * * * *
* * * * *

CII

To Captain Riou, as a treat
For him and for his archers too,
I give six wolvis-heads (a meat
No swineherds' fare that is, look you)
Coursed with great dogs and set to stew
In tavern wine. In sooth, to feed
Upon these dainties rare and new,
One might do many an ill deed.

CIII

'Tis meat a trifle heavier
Than either feathers, cork or down:
For folk afield 'tis famous fare,
In camp or leaguer of a town.
But (failing dogs to hunting boun)
An if the beasts in trap be ta'en,
The skins, to fur his winter gown,
As a right tanner, I ordain.

CIV

Item, to Robinet Troussecaille
(Who's thriven rarely in his trade;
He scorns to go afoot like quail,
But sits a fat roan stoutly made)
My platter, that he is afraid
To borrow, I on him bestow;
So will he now be all arrayed:
He needed nothing else, I know.

CV

To Perrot Girard I will well
(That's barber sworn at Bourg la Reine)
Two basins and a fish-kettle,
Since he's so eager after gain.
Six years ago, the man was fain
For seven whole days (God have his soul!)
Me with fat porkers to sustain;
Witness the Abbess of Shaven-poll.

CVI

Item, unto the Begging Frères,
The Devotees and the Beguines,
At Paris, Orleans and elsewhere,
Both Turpelins and Turpelines, —
Of stout meat soups with flawns beseen
I make oblation. * *
* * * * *
* * * * *

CVII

NAY, 'tis not I that give them this;
But from their loins all children spring
Through God that guerdons them ywis
For their much swink and travailing.
Each one of them must live, poor thing,—
E'en monks of Paris, if they go
Our cummers still a-pleasuring,
God wot, they love their husbands so.

CVIII

Whatever Master Jehan Poullieu
Missaid of them, et reliqua,
Constrained in public place thereto,
His words perforce he did unsay:
Meung of their fashion in his day
Made mock, and Matheolus too:
But honour unto that alway
Which God's Church honoureth is due.

CIX

So I submit me, for my part,
In all that I can do or say,
To honour them with all my heart
And yield them service, as I may.
Fools only will of them missay:
For or in pulpit or elsewhere
None needeth to be told if they
Are wont their enemies to spare.

CX

Item, I give to Brother Baude,
   In the Mount Carmel Convent who
Good cheer doth make and his abode,
   A morion and gisarms two,
   Lest anything Decosta do
To steal from him his wench away.
   He's old; unless he quit the stew,
There'll be the deuce and all to pay.

CXI

Item, for that the Chancellor
   Hath chewed fly-droppings off and on
Full many a time, his seal yet more
   (I give and grant) be spat upon;
   And let him sprain his thumb anon,
(Him of the diocese, I mean,)
   To put my wishes all in one:
God keep the others all from teen.

CXII

I give my Lords the Auditors
   Wainscot to make their chamber fair;
And each whose buttocks in the wars
   Have been, a hollow-bottomed chair,
   Provided that they do not spare
Macée of Orleans, who, God wot,
   Had my virginity whilere,
For she's a thoroughly bad lot.

CXIII

To Master Francis (if he live),
Promoter de la Vacquerie,
A Scotchman's collaret I give,
Of hemp without embroidery;
For, when he put on chivalry,
God and St. George he did blaspheme
And ne'er hears speak of them but he
Doth with mad laughter shout and scream.

CXIV

I give Jehan Laurens, whose poor eyes
Are still so red and weak, (I ween,
The fault o't with his parents lies,
Who drank withouten stint or mean),
My hose-linings, to wipe them clean
O' mornings, lest they waxen blear;
Had he of Bourges archbishop been,
He had had sendal; but that's dear.

CXV

Item, to Master Jehan Cotard,
My Church-court proctor, since some groat
Or two for fees yet owing are,
(That had till now escaped my thought)
When action 'gainst me Denise brought,
Saying I had miscallèd her, —
I have this Orison ywrought
So God to heaven his soul prefer.

Ballad and Orison

I

NOAH, that first the vine plantèd;
Lot, too, that in the grot drank high,
*   *   *   *   *
*   *   *   *   *
*   *   *   *   *
Architriclinus, learn'd in the bowl, —
I pray you all three to set in the sky
Good Master Cotard, honest soul.

II

He was of your lineage born and bred;
He drank of the best and dearest; ay,
Though he'd never a stiver to stand him in stead,
The best of all topers he was: for why,
Never good liquor found him shy,
None could the pot from his grasp cajole.
Fair Lords, do not suffer in hell to sigh
Good Master Cotard, honest soul.

III

I've seen him oft, when he went to bed,
Totter for tipple as like to die;
And once he gat him a bump on the head
'Gainst a butcher's stall, as he staggered by.
Brief, one might question far and nigh
For a better fellow the cup to trowl.
Let him in, if you hear him the wicket try:
Good Master Cotard, honest soul.

Envoi

He scarce could spit, he was always so dry,
And ever 'My throat's like a red-hot coal!"
Parched up with thirst, he was wont to cry;
Good Master Cotard, honest soul.

CXVI

Item, henceforth young Merle shall still
Manage my change (for evermo'
God wot, it is against my will
With change I intermeddle) so
Full change he give to high and low,
Three crowns six half-crowns, and two small
Angels one great one; for, you know,
A lover should be liberal.

CXVII

Item, I've seen with my own eyes
That my poor orphans, all the three,
Are grown in age, and wit likewise.
No sheepsheads are they, I can see;
From here to Salins none there be
That better bear them at the schools:
Now, by the Confraternity,
Lads of this fashion are no fools.

CXVIII

I will that they to college go;
  Whither? To Master Pierre Richer.
Donatus is too hard, I trow:
  Thereat I will not have them stay.
  I'd rather they should learn to say
An Ave Mary and there stand,
  Without more letters; for alway
Scholars have not the upper hand.

CXIX

Let them learn this and there leave off;
  I do forbid them to proceed:
Meseems it is too hard and tough
  For boys to understand the Creed.
  I halve my long gray tabard wede
And will one half thereof to sell
  And buy them pancakes: for indeed
Children did ever love cates well.

CXX

I will that they well grounded be
  In manners, though it cost them dear:
Close hoods shall they wear, all the three,
  And go with thumbs in girdle-gear,
  Humble to all that come them near,
Saying, 'Eh, what? . . . Don't mention it!'
  So folks shall say, when they appear,
'These lads are gently bred,' to wit.

CXXI

Item, unto my clerklings lean, —
  To whom my titles and degree
(Seeing them fair and well beseen
  And straight as reeds) I gave in fee,
  And also, without price and free,
I did my rent and charge assign,
  To levy on the pillory,
As safe and sure as if 'twere mine:

CXXII

(Though they be young and of good cheer,
  In that they nothing me displease:
Come twenty, thirty, forty year,
  They will be other, so God please.
  Ill doth he that maltreateth these,
Since fair they are and in their prime:
  Fools only will them beat and pheeze;
For younglings grow to men in time,) —

CXXIII

The purses of the Clerks Eighteen
  They'll have, although my back I break:
They're not like dormice, that grow lean
  With three months' sleep before they wake
  Ill fares he that his sleep doth take
In youth, when rise and work should he,
  So that he needs must watch and wake
In age, when he should sleeping be.

CXXIV

Thereof unto the Almoner
  Letters to like effect I write.
If they to pray for me demur,
  Let pull their ears for such despite.
  Folk often marvel all their might
Why by these twain such store set I;
  But, fast or feastdays, honour bright,
I never came their mothers nigh.

CXXV

To Michault Culdou I bespeak,
  As also to Charlot Taranne,
One hundred sols. Let neither seek
  Whence; 'twill be manna to each man:
  Also my boots of leather tan,
Both soles and uppers, sundry pair;
  So they forgather not with Jehanne
Nor any other like to her.

CXXVI

Unto the Seigneur de Grigny,
  To whom I left Bicêtre of yore,
I give the castle of Billy;
  Provided window, gate and door
  He 'stablish as they were before,
That so in good repair it be.
  Let him make money evermore;
For coin I lack and none has he.

CXXVII

To Thibault de la Garde, no less, . . .
  (Thibault? I lie: his name is John)
What can I spare, without distress?
  I've lost enough this year bygone:
  May God provide him! . . . and so on.
What if I left him the Canteen?
  No: Genevoys's the elder one
And has more nose to dip therein.

CXXVIII

Item, I give to Basanier,
  The judge's clerk and notary,
A frail of cloves, which levied may
  On Master Jehan de Rueil be:
  Mautainct and Rosnel the like fee
Shall have, which them I trust will stir
  To serve with courage brisk and free
The Lord who serves Saint Christopher;

CXXIX

On whom the Ballad following
  For his fair lady I bestow: . . .
If love to us no such prize fling,
  I marvel not; for, whiles ago,
  He bore her off from high and low,
At that tourney King René made:
  Hector or Troilus ne'er, I trow,
So much performed, so little said.

Ballad that Villon Gave to a Newly Married Gentleman to Send to his Lady by him Conquered at the Sword's Point

I

THE falcon claps his wings at break of day,
For noble usance, ay, and lustihead;
Frolics for glee and strikes and rends his prey;
Stoops to his mate and does of her his need.
So now to-you-ward doth desire me lead
Of that all lovers long for joyously;
Know, Love hath so ordained it in his rede;
And to this end we twain together be.

II

Queen of my heart, unquestioned and alway,
Till death consume me, thou shalt be indeed.
Clary, that purgest my chagrins, sweet bay,
That still as champion for my right dost plead,
Reason ordains that I should ne'er be freed
(And therewithal my pleasure doth agree)
From thy sweet service, while the years succeed;
And to this end we twain together be.

III

And what is more, when dule doth me essay,
Through Fate that oftime lowers, with all speed
Thy dulcet looks her malice do away,
As wind disperses smoke from hill and mead.
In no wise, sweetest, do I lose the seed
Sown in thy field, when the fruit likeneth me;
God wills me delve and fatten it and weed;
And to this end we twain together be.

ENVOI

Princess, I pray, to my discourse give heed:
My heart shall not dissever aye from thee
Nor thine from me, if it aright I read:
And to this end we twain together be.

CXXX

Item, I give Jehan Perdryer nought,
And to his brother Frank the same;
Though still to help me they have wrought
And make me sharer in their game;
(Tongues have they, sharp and fierce as flame:)
And too, my gossip Frank, of yore,
Without command or prayer, my name
At Bourges commended passing sore.

CXXXI

Let them in Taillevent go see
  The chapters that of frying treat,
If they can find my recipe
  For dressing up this kind of meat:
  'Twas Saint Macaire, I once did meet,
Cooking a devil, skin and all,
  That so the roast should smell more sweet,
Gave me this Recipe, that I call.

BALLAD OF SLANDEROUS TONGUES[1]

CXXXII

To Andry Courault, next, give I
  The Counterblast to Franc-Gontier;
As for the Tyrant, set on high,
  I've nought, indeed, to him to say:
  Wisdom forbids that in affray
With mighty men poor folk should strive,
  Lest they spread nets across the way,
To catch the vauntards in alive.

CXXXIII

I fear not Gontier, that no men
  Has nor is better off than I:
But now strife is betwixt us twain;
  For he exalteth poverty:
  Good luck he deemeth it, perdie,
Winter and summer to be poor.
  Myself, I hold it misery.
Who's wrong? Be you judge, I conjure.

[1] This Ballad is omitted.

Ballad Entitled the Counter Blast to Franc-Gontier

I

ATHWART a hole in the arras, t'other day,
I saw a fat priest lie on a down bed,
Hard by a fire; and by his side there lay
Dame Sydonie, full comely, white and red:
By night and day a goodly life they led.
I watched them laugh and kiss and play, drink high
Of spicèd hypocras; * * *
* * * * *
* * * * *
* * * *Thence knew I*
There is no treasure but to have one's ease.

II

If, with his mistress Helen, Franc-Gontier
Had all their life this goodly fashion sped,
With cloves of garlic, rank of smell alway,
They had no need to rub their oaten bread:
For all their curds (sans malice be it said)
No jot I care, nor all their cakes of rye.
If they delight beneath the rose to lie,
What say you? Must we couch afield like these?
Like you not better bed and chair therenigh?
There is no treasure but to have one's ease.

III

They eat coarse bread of barley, sooth to say,
And drink but water from the heavens shed:
Not all the birds that singen all the way
From here to Babylon could me persuade
To spend one day so harboured and so fed.
For God's sake let Franc-Gontier none deny
To play with Helen 'neath the open sky!
Why should it irk me, if they love the leas?
But, vaunt who will the joys of husbandry,
There is no treasure but to have one's ease.

ENVOI

Prince, be you judge betwixt us all: for my
Poor part I mind me (so it none displease)
Whilst yet a child, I heard folk testify,
There is no treasure but to have one's ease.

CXXXIV

Item, since Madame de Bruyères
Her bible knows, to publish it
(Barring the Gospels) unto her
And to her damsels I commit,
To bring each glib-tongued wanton chit
To book; but be the preachment not
Within the churchyards; far more fit
'Twere in the net-market, God wot.

Ballad of the Women of Paris

I

THOUGH folk deem women young and old
Of Venice and Genoa well eno'
Favoured with speech, both glib and bold,
To carry messages to and fro;
Savoyards, Florentines less or more,
Romans and Lombards though folk renown,
I, at my peril, I say no;
There's no right speech out of Paris town.

II

The Naples women (so we are told)
Can school all comers in speech and show;
Prussians and Germans were still extolled
For pleasant prattle of friend and foe;
But hail they from Athens or Grand Cairo,
Castile or Hungary, black or brown,
Greeks or Egyptians, high or low,
There's no right speech out of Paris town.

III

Switzers nor Bretons know how to scold,
Nor Provence nor Gascony women: lo!
Two fishfags in Paris the bridge that hold
Would slang them dumb in a minute or so.
Picardy, England, Lorraine, (heigho!
Enough of places have I set down?)
Valenciennes, Calais, wherever you go,
There's no right speech out of Paris town.

Envoi

Prince, to the Paris ladies, I trow,
For pleasant parlance I yield the crown.
They may talk of Italians; but this I know,
There's no right speech out of Paris town.

CXXXV

Look at them there, by twos and threes,
Upon their gowns' hem seated low,
In churches and in nunneries:
Speak not, but softly near them go
And speedily you'll come to know
Such judgments as Macrobius ne'er
Did give. What e'er you catch, I trow,
'Twill all some flower of wisdom bear.

CXXXVI

Item, unto Mount Martyr hill
(Old past the memory of man)
Let them adjoin (it is my will)
The knoll called Mount Valerian:
I give it for a quarter's span
The indulgences from Rome I brought;
Whence shall the convent, where no man
Might come, of many now be sought.

CXXXVII

Item, to serving men and maids
Of good hostels (in no despite),
Pheasants, tarts, custards and croustades
And high carousal at midnight:
Seven pints or eight, the matter's slight,
Whilst sound asleep are lord and dame:
* * * * *
* * * * *

CXXXVIII

Item, to honest wenches who
Have fathers, mothers, aunts ... 'Fore God!
I've nothing left to give to you:
All on the servants I've bestowed.
Poor silly wantons, they had showed
Themselves with little satisfied!
Some scraps might well have gone their road
Of all the convents cast aside.

CXXIX

Cistercians and Celestines,
Though they be railed off from the rest,
They eat rich meats and drink sweet wines,
Whereof poor whores know not the zest:
As Jehanne and Perrette can attest
And Isabeau that says "Is't not?"
Since they therefor are so distrest,
One scarce were damn'd for it, God wot.

CXL

Item, to sturdy stout Margot,
  Of face and favour fair and feat,
A pious creature, too, eno', —
  I' faith, by God Almighty be't,
  I love her well, the proper peat,
As she (sweet chuck) loves me indeed:
  If any chance with her to meet,
Let him this Ballad to her read.

BALLAD OF VILLON AND MUCKLE MEG[1]

CXLI

Item, to Marion (Statue hight)
  And to tall Jehanne of Brittany,
I give to keep a school by night,
  Where masters taught of scholars be:
  A thing you everywhere may see,
Except in Mehun gaol alone.
  Wherefore I say, Out on the fee!
Since that the trick is so well known.

CXLII

Item, to Noel Well-beseen
  No other gift I do ordain
Than both hands full of osiers green,
  Out of my garden freshly ta'en:
  (One should to chastisement be fain;
In sooth it is fair almsgiving:)
  Eleven score strokes laid on amain,
Of Master Hal's administ'ring.

[1] This ballad is omitted.

CXLIII

Item, the Hospitals unto
What to bequeath I hardly know:
Here jests are neither right nor due,
For sick poor folk have ills eno':
Let each man's leavings to them go.
The Mendicants have had my goose:
Nought but the bones they'll get, I trow;
The poor can seldom pick and choose.

CXLIV

I give my barber, (an he list) —
By name that Colin Galerne hight,
Near Angelot's the Herbalist, —
A lump of ice: let him apply't
Upon his paunch and hold it tight,
So he may freeze as seems him meet:
If thus o' winter deal the wight,
He'll not complain of summer heat,

CXLV

Item, I leave the Foundlings nought:
But to the Lostlings comfort's due,
Who should, if anywhere, be sought
Where lodges Marion the Statue.
A lesson of my sort to you
I'll read: 'twill soon be overpast.
Turn not, I pray, deaf ears thereto,
But listen sadly: 'tis the last.

Seemly Lesson of Villon to the Good-for-noughts

I

FAIR sons, you're wasting, ere you're old,
The fairest rose to you that fell.
You, that like birdlime take and hold,
When to Montpippeau or Ruel
(My clerks) you wander, keep you well:
For of the tricks that there he played,
Thinking to 'scape a second spell,
Colin of Cayeulx lost his head.

II

No trifling game is this to play,
Where one stakes soul and body too:
If losers, no remorse can stay
A shameful death from ending you;
And even the winner, for his due,
Hath not a Dido to his wife.
Foolish and lewd I hold him who
Doth for so little risk his life.

III

Now all of you to me attend:
Even a load of wine, folk say,
With drinking at last comes to an end,
By fire in winter, in woods in May.
If you have money, it doth not stay,
But this way and that it wastes amain:
What does it profit you, any way?
Ill-gotten good is nobody's gain?

Ballad of Good Doctrine to Those of Ill Life

I

PEDDLE indulgences, as you may:
Cog the dice for your cheating throws:
Try if counterfeit coin will pay,
At risk of roasting at last, like those
That deal in treason. Lie and glose,
Rob and ravish: what profit it?
Who gets the purchase, do you suppose?
Taverns and wenches, every whit.

II

Rhyme, rail, wrestle and cymbals play:
Flute and fool it in mummers' shows:
Along with the strolling players stray
From town to city, without repose;
Act mysteries, farces, imbroglios:
Win money at gleek or a lucky hit
At the pins: like water, away it flows;
Taverns and wenches, every whit.

III

Turn from your evil courses I pray,
That smell so foul in a decent nose:
Earn your bread in some honest way.
If you have no letters, nor verse nor prose,
Plough or groom horses, beat hemp or toze,
Enough shall you have if you think but fit:
But cast not your wage to each wind that blows;
Taverns and wenches, every whit.

ENVOI

Doublets, pourpoints and silken hose,
Gowns and linen, woven or knit,
Ere your wede's worn, away it goes;
Taverns and wenches, every whit.

CXLVI

Companions in debauchery,
Ill souls and bodies well bestead,
Beware of that ill sun (look ye)
That tans a man when he is dead:
'Tis a foul death to die, I dread.
Keep yourselves from it, so you may;
And be this still rememberèd,
That all of you must die some day.

CXLVII

Item, I give the Fifteen-score —
(Three hundred just as well 'tmight be) —
For that by them I set great store,
(Paris, nor Provins ones, for me) —
My goggles (sans the case, perdie)
So in the churchyards where they serve,
They may the bad to sever see
From honest folk that well deserve.

CXLVIII

HERE[1] silence doth for ever reign:
Nothing it profiteth the dead
On beds of satin to have lain
And drunk from gold the vine-juice red
And lived in glee and lustihead.
Soon all such joys must be resigned:
All pass away, and in their stead
Only the sin remains behind.

CXLIX

When I consider all the heads
That in these charnels gathered be,
Those that are sleeping in these beds
May have (for aught that I can see)
Been mighty lords of high degree,
Bishops and dames, — or else poor churls:
There is no difference to me
'Twixt watercarriers' bones and earls.

[1] *i.e.* in the churchyards.

CL

These ladies all, that in their day
  Each against each did bend and bow,
Whereof did some the sceptre sway,
  Of others feared and courted, — now
  Here are they sleeping all a-row,
Heaped up together anydele,
  Their crowns and honours all laid low.
Masters or clerks, there's no appeal.

CLI

Now are they dead, God have their sprights!
  As for their bodies, they are clay:
Once they were ladies, lords and knights,
  That on soft beds of satin lay
  And feed on dainties every day.
Their bones are mouldered into dust,
  They reck not now of laugh or play:
Christ will assoilzie them, I trust.

CLII

I make this ditty for the dead:
  The which I do communicate
To Courts and Pleas, ill doers' dread,
  That unjust avarice do hate;
  That for the welfare of the state
Do work their bones and bodies dry:
  God and St. Dominick abate
Their sins unto them when they die.

CLIII

Item, Jacques Cardon nought of me
(For nought I have for him) shall get,
— Not that he'd throw't away, perdie —
Except this roundel; if 'twere set
To some such tune as "Marionette,"
Composed for Marion Slow-to-come,
Or "Hold your door open, Guillemette,"
It might belike the vogue become.

Roundel

On my release *from prison strait,*
Where I have left my life well-nigh,
If Fate still look at me awry,
Judge if she be inveterate!
Reason meseemeth, past debate,
Her malice she should mollify
On my release.

Full of unreason is this Fate,
Which willeth but that I should die:
God grant that in His house on high
My soul be ravished from her hate,
On my release.

CLIV

THIS gift shall Lomer have of me,
— As sure as I'm a fairy's son, —
That he shall 'well-belovèd' be,
But wench or woman love he none
Nor lose his head for any one,
And that an hundred times a night
The trick for nought of him be done,
In spite of Holger the good knight.

CLV

To lovers sick and sorrowful,
(As well as Alain Chartier's Lay,)
At bedhead, a benature-full
Of tears I give, and eke a spray
Of eglatere or flowering May,
(To sprinkle with) in time of green;
Provided they a *Psalter* say.
To save poor Villon's soul from teen.

CLVI

To Master James, that day and night
Himself at hoarding wealth doth kill,
I give as many girls to plight
(But none to marry) as he will.
For whom doth he his coffers fill?
For those that are his kin, alack!
That which the sows' was, I hold ill
Should to the porkers not go back.

CLVII

Unto the Seneschal I bequeath, —
(Who once from debt did me release)
Besides the quality of Smith, —
The right of shoeing ducks and geese.
I send him all these fooleries,
To help him pass away the time,
Or make him spillets if he please:
One wearies of the best of rhyme.

CLVIII

The Captain of the Watch, also —
Two proper youths to serve as page;
Marquet the Stout and Philippot,
Who for the most part of their age
Have served (whence are they the more sage)
The Blacksmiths' Provost. Wellaway!
If they should chance to lose their wage,
They must go shoeless many a day.

CLIX

Item, to Chappelain let there pass
My simple-tonsure chapelry,
Charged but with saying a low mass:
There little letters needed be.
My cure of souls he should of me
Have had; but no one to confess
(To go by what he says) cares he,
Save chambermaids and mistresses.

CLX

Since my intent he well doth know,
To Jehan de Calais — (worthy wight!
Who saw me thirty years ago
And hath not since on me set sight,
Indeed, nor knoweth how I hight) —
If in this Testament befall
Or hitch or doubt, I give full right
To solve and mend them, one and all·

CLXI

To glose upon it and comment,
Define, eliminate, prescribe,
Diminish aught or aught augment,
To cancel it or it transcribe
With his own hand, although no scribe
He be; such sense as he thinks fit,
At pleasure, good or bad, ascribe
Thereto: I sanction all of it.

CLXII

And if, perchance, some legatee,
Without my knowledge, should be dead,
It shall at the discretion be
Of Jehan de Calais aforesaid
To see my will interpreted
And otherwise the gift apply
Nor take it for himself instead:
I charge him on his soul thereby.

CLXIII

Item, my body, I ordain,
  Shall at St. Avoye buried be:
And that my friends may there again
  My image and presentment see,
  Let one the semblant limn of me
In ink, if that be not too dear.
  No other monument, perdie:
'Twould overload the floor, I fear.

CLXIV

Item, I will that over it
  That which ensues, without word more,
In letters large enough to be writ:
  If ink fail (as I said before),
  Let them the words with charcoal score,
So they do not the plaster drag:
  'Twill serve to keep my name in store,
As that of a good crack-brained wag.

Epitaph

CLXV

Here lies and slumbers in this place
  One whom Love wreaked his ire upon:
A scholar, poor of goods and grace,
  That hight of old François Villon:
  Acre or furrow had he none.
'Tis known his all he gave away;
  Bread, tables, tressels, all are gone.
Gallants, of him this roundel say.

Roundel

Æternam Requiem dona,
Lord God, and everlasting light,
To him who never had, poor wight,
Platter, or aught thereon to lay!
Hair, eyebrows, beard all fallen away,
Like a peeled turnip was his plight.
Æternam Requiem dona.

Exile compelled him many a day
And death at last his breech did smite,
Though, 'I appeal,' with all his might
The man in good plain speech did say.
Æternam Requiem dona.

CLXVI

Item, I will they toll for me
The 'Belfry' Bell, that is so great
Of voice, that all astonied be
When he is tolled, early or late.
Many a good city, of old date,
He saved, as every one doth know;
Thunder or war, all ills abate
When through the land his voices go.

CLXVII

Four loaves the ringers' wage shall be:
  If that too little, six: (that is
What rich folk wont to give for fee:)
  But they St. Stephen's loaves, ywis,
  Shall be. Let Vollant share in this;
A man that earns his living hard:
  'Twill furnish forth a week of his.
The other one? Jehan de la Garde.

CLXVIII

Item, to carry out this all,
  As my executors I name
Men who are good to deal withal
  And never shirk an honest claim:
  They're no great vauntards, all the same,
Though they've good cause for it, perdie;
  They shall fulfill my thought and aim:
Write, I will name six names to thee.

CLXIX

First, Master Martin de Bellefaye,
  The King's Lieutenant-criminel.
Who shall be next? Whom shall I say?
  It shall be Messire Colombel:
  If, as I think, it like him well,
He'll undertake this charge for me.
  The third one? Michel Jouvenel:
I give the office to these three.

CLXX

Natheless, in case they should excuse
  Themselves therefrom, for fear of fees,
Or altogether should refuse,
  I name as their successors these,
  Good men and true in their degrees:
Philip Brunel, the noble squire,
  For next, his neighbour (an he please),
Master Jacques Raguyer, I desire.

CLXXI

Master Jacques James shall be the third:
  Three men of worth and good renown,
That for believers in God's Word
  And right God-fearing souls are known;
  Far rather would they spend their own
Than not my full intent fulfil
  No auditor on them shall frown:
They shall do all at their own will.

CLXXII

The Register of Wills from me
  Shall have nor quid nor quod, I trow:
But every penny of his fee
  To Tricot, the young priest, shall go;
  At whose expense gladly eno'
I'd drink, though it my nightcap cost:
  If but he knew the dice to throw,
Of Perrette's Den I'd make him host.

CLXXIII

Guillaume du Ru, for funeral,
  Shall see the chapel duly lit;
And as to who shall bear the pall,
  Let my executors order it.
  And now, my body every whit
(Groin, eyebrows, hair and beard and all
  Being racked with pain, the time seems
      fit
To cry folk mercy, great and small.

Ballad Crying All Folk Mercy

I

FRERES, be they white or be they grey;
  Nuns, mumpers, chanters awry that
      tread
And clink their pattens on each highway;
  Lackeys and handmaids, apparellèd
  In tight-fitting surcoats, white and red;
Gallants, whose boots o'er their ankles fall,
  That vaunt and ruffle it unadread;
I cry folk mercy, one and all.

II

Wantons who all their charms display,
That so more custom to them be led,
Brawlers and jugglers and tumblers gay;
Clowns with their apes and carpet spread;
Players that whistle for lustihead,
As they trudge it 'twixt village and town and hall;
Gentle and simple, living and dead, —
I cry folk mercy, one and all.

III

Save only the treacherous beasts of prey,
That garred me batten on prison bread
And water, many a night and day.
I fear them not now, no, not a shred;
And gladly (but that I lie a-bed
And have small stomach for strife or brawl)
I'd have my wreak of them. Now, instead,
I cry folk mercy, one and all.

ENVOI

So but the knaves be ribroastéd
And basted well with an oaken maul
Or some stout horsewhip weighted with lead,
I cry folk mercy, one and all.

Ballad, by Way of Ending

I

HERE is ended (both great and small)
Poor Villon's Testament! When he is dead,
Come, I pray, to his funeral,
Whilst the bell tinkles overhead.
Come in cramozin garmented;
For to Love martyr did he die.
Thereof he swore on his manlihead,
Whenas he felt his end draw nigh.

II

For me, I warrant it true in all;
For of his love, in shameful stead,
He was beaten off, like a bandy-ball.
From here to Roussillon as he fled,
There's ne'er a bramble but tore some shred
Of hose or jerkin from hip or thigh;
So, without leasing, Villon said,
Whenas he felt his end draw nigh.

III

In such ill places his life did fall,
He had but a rag when he was sped:
And (yet more luckless) when death did call,
Love's prickle galled him; its wounds still bled
In him. His heart was heavy as lead
And salt tears stood in his dying eye:
At his despair we were wonderèd,
Whenas he felt his end draw nigh.

Envoi

Prince, that art gent as a yearling gled,
Hear what he did with his latest sigh:
He drank a long draught of the vine-juice red,
Whenas he felt his end draw nigh.

HERE ENDETH THE GREATER TESTAMENT
OF MASTER FRANÇOIS VILLON

DIVERS POEMS

Here follow Divers Poems of Master François Villon, not being part of his Lesser and Greater Testaments

Ballad of Villon in Prison

I

HAVE pity, friends, have pity now, I pray,
If it so please you, at the least, on me!
I lie in fosse, not under holm or may
In this duresse, wherein, alas! I dree
Ill fate, as God did thereanent decree.
Lasses and lovers, younglings manifold,
Dancers and mountebanks, alert and bold,
Nimble as squirrel from a crossbow shot
Singers, that troll as clear as bells of gold,—
Will you all leave poor Villon here to rot?

II

Clerks, that go carolling the livelong day,
Scant-pursed, but glad and frank and full of glee;
Wandering at will along the broad highway,
Harebrained, perchance, but wit-whole too, perdie:
Lo! now, I die, whilst that you absent be.
Song-singers, when poor Villon's days are told,
You will sing psalms for him and candles hold;
Here light nor air nor levin enters not,
Where ramparts thick are round about him rolled.
Will you all leave poor Villon here to rot?

III

Consider but his piteous array,
High and fair lords, of suit and service free,
That nor to king nor kaiser homage pay,
But straight from God in heaven hold your fee!
Come fast or feast, all days alike fasts he,
Whence are his teeth like rakes' teeth to behold:
No table hath he but the sheer black mould
After dry bread (not manchets), pot on pot
They empty down his throat of water cold:
Will you all leave poor Villon here to rot?

ENVOI

Princes and lords aforesaid, young and old,
Get me the King his letters sealed and scrolled
And draw me from this dungeon: for, God wot,
Even swine, when one squeaks in the butcher's fold,
Flock around their fellow and do squeak and scold.
Will you all leave poor Villon here to rot?

The Quatrain that Villon Made when he was Doomed to Die

FRANÇOIS am I, — woe worth it me!
At Paris born, near Pontoise citie,
Whose neck, in the bight of a rope of three,
Must prove how heavy my buttocks be.

Variant to the Foregoing Epitaph

FRANÇOIS am I, — woe worth it me!
— Corbier my surname is aright:
Native of Auvers, near Pontoise citie;
Of folk for sobriquet Villon hight.
But for the gallant appeal I made,
My neck, in the bight of a rope of three,
Had known ere this what my buttocks weighed.
The game scarce seemed to me worth to be played.

The Epitaph in Ballad Form That Villon Made for Himself and His Companions, Expecting no Better Than to be Hanged in Their Company

I

BROTHERS, that after us on life remain,
Harden your hearts against us not as stone;
For, if to pity us poor wights you're fain,
God shall the rather grant you benison.
You see us six, the gibbet hereupon:
As for the flesh that we too well have fed,
'Tis all devoured and rotted, shred by shred.
Let none make merry of our piteous case,
Whose crumbling bones the life long since hath fled:
The rather pray, God grant us of His grace!

II

Yea, we conjure you, look not with disdain,
Brothers, on us, though we to death were done
By justice. Well you know, the saving grain
Of sense springs not in every mother's son:
Commend us, therefore, now we're dead and gone,
To Christ, the Son of Mary's maidenhead,
That he leave not His grace on us to shed
And save us from the nether torture-place.
Let no one harry us: forsooth, we're sped:
The rather pray, God grant us of His grace!

III

We are whiles scoured and soddened of the rain
And whiles burnt up and blackened of the sun:
Corbies and pyets have our eyes out-ta'en
And plucked our beard and hair out, one by one.
Whether by night or day, rest have we none:
Now here, now there, as the wind shifts its stead,
We swing and creak and rattle overhead,
No thimble dinted like our bird-pecked face.
Brothers, have heed and shun the life we led:
The rather pray, God grant us of His grace!

Envoi

Prince Jesus, over all empoweréd,
Let us not fall into the Place of Dread,
But all our reckoning with the Fiend efface.
Folk, mock us not that are forspent and dead;
The rather pray, God grant us of His grace!

The Request of Villon Presented to the High Court of Parliament in Ballad Form

I

ALL my five senses, in your several place,
Hearing and seeing, taste and touch and smell,
Every my member branded with disgrace,—
Each on this fashion do ye speak and tell:
'Most Sovereign Court, by whom we here befell,
Thou that deliveredst us from sore dismays,
The tongue sufficeth not thy name to blaze
Forth in such strain of honour as it should:
Wherefore to thee our voices all we raise,
Sister of angels, mother of the good!'

II

Heart, cleave in sunder, or in any case
  Be not more hardened and impermeable
Than was the black rock in the desert-space,
  Which with sweet water for the Jews did
      swell;
  Melt into tears and mercy cry, as well
Befits a lowly heart that humbly prays:
Give to the Court, the kingdom's glory,
      praise, —
  The Frenchman's stay, the help of
      strangerhood,
Born of high heaven amidst the empyreal
      rays:
  Sister of angels, mother of the good!

III

And you, my teeth, your sockets leave
      apace;
  Come forward, all, and loudlier than bell,
Organ or clarion, render thanks for grace
  And every thought of chewing now repel.
  Bethink you, I was doomed to death and
      hell,
Heart, spleen and liver palsied with affrays:
And you, my body, (else you were more base
  Than bear or swine that in the dunghill
      brood,)
Extol the Court, ere worser hap amaze;
  Sister of angels, mother of the good!

Envoi

Prince, of thy grace deny me not three days
To bid my friends adieu and go my ways:
Without them, I've nor money, clothes nor food.
Triumphant Court, be't as thy suppliant says;
Sister of angels, mother of the good!

Ballad of Villon's Appeal

I

GARNIER, how like you my appeal?
Did I wisely, or did I ill?
Each beast looks to his own skin's weal:
If any bind him, to keep or kill,
He does himself free to the best of his skill.
When, then, sans reason, to me was sung
This pleasant psalm of a sentence, still
Was it a time to hold my tongue?

II

Were I of Capet's race somedele
(Whose kin were butchers on Montmartre hill)
They had not bound me with iron and steel
Nor forced me to swizzle more than my fill:
(You know the trick of it, will or nill?)
But, when of malice prepense and wrong,
They doomed me to swallow this bitter pill.
Was it a time to hold my tongue?

III

Think you that under my cap I feel
Not reason nor ableness there until,
Sufficient to say, 'I do appeal'?
Enough was left me (as warrant I will)
To keep me from holding my clapper still,
When jargon, that meant 'You shall be hung'
They read to me from the notary's bill:
Was it a time to hold my tongue?

ENVOI

Prince, had I had the pip in my bill,
Long before this I should have swung,
A scarecrow hard by Montfaucon mill!
Was it a time to hold my tongue?

Ballad of Proverbs

I

GOATS scratch until they spoil their bed:
Pitcher to well too oft we send:
The iron's heated till it's red
And hammered till in twain it rend:
The tree grows as the twig we bend:
Men journey till they disappear
Even from the memory of a friend:
We shout out 'Noël' till it's here.

II

Some mock until their hearts do bleed:
Some are so frank that they offend:
Some waste until they come to need:
A promised gift is ill to spend:
Some love God till from church they trend:
Wind shifts until to North it veer:
Till forced to borrow do we lend:
We shout out 'Noël' till it's here.

III

Dogs fawn on us till them we feed:
  Song's sung until by heart it's kenned:
Fruit's kept until it rot to seed:
  The leagured place falls in the end:
  Folk linger till the occasion wend:
Haste oft throws all things out of gear:
  One clips until the grasp's o'erstrained:
We shout out 'Noël' till it's here.

ENVOI

Prince, fools live so long that they mend:
  They go so far that they draw near:
They're cozened till they apprehend:
  We shout out 'Noël' till it's here.

BALLAD OF THINGS KNOWN AND UNKNOWN

I

FLIES in the milk I know full well:
  I know men by the clothes they wear:
I know the walnut by the shell:
  I know the foul sky from the fair:
  I know the pear-tree by the pear:
I know the worker from the drone
  And eke the good wheat from the tare:
I know all save myself alone.

II

I know the pourpoint by the fell
  And by his gown I know the frère:
Master by varlet I can spell:
  Nuns by the veils that hide their hair:
  I know the sharper and his snare
And fools that fat on cates have grown:
  Wines by the cask I can compare:
I know all save myself alone.

III

I know how horse from mule to tell:
  I know the load that each can bear:
I know both Beatrice and Bell:
  I know the hazards, odd and pair:
  I know of visions in the air:
I know the power of Peter's throne
  And how misled Bohemians were:
I know all save myself alone.

ENVOI

Prince, I know all things: fat and spare:
  Rudy and pale, to me are known:
And Death that endeth all our care:
  I know all save myself alone.

Ballad of Poor Chimneysweeps

I

MEN talk of those the fields that till;
  Of those that sift out chaff from corn;
Of him that has, will he or nill,
  A wife that scoldeth night and morn, —
  As folk hard driven and forlorn:
Of men that often use the sea;
Of monks that of poor convents be;
  Of those behind the ass that go:
But, when all things consider we,
  Poor chimneysweeps have toil eno'.

II

To govern boys and girls with skill,
  God wot, 's no labour lightly borne:
Nor to serve ladies at Love's will;
  Or do knight suit at sound of horn,
  Helmet and harness always worn,
And follow arms courageously:
To joust and tilt with spears, perdie,
  And quintain play, is hard, I know;
But, when all things consider we,
  Poor chimney sweeps have toil eno'.

III

God wot, they suffer little ill
  By whom wheat's reaped and meadows
      shorn;
Or those that thresh grain for the mill
  Or plead the Parliament beforne;
  To borrow money's little scorn;
Tinkers and carters have to dree
But little hardship, seemeth me;
  Nor does Lent irk us much, I trow:
But, when all things consider we,
  Poor chimneysweeps have toil eno'.

[Envoi *deest.*]

Ballad of Fortune

I

I OF old time by makers Fortune hight—
  Whom, François, thou dost rail at
      and decry, —
Far better men than thou, poor nameless
      wight,
  I grind into the dust with poverty
  And gar them delve i' the quarries till
      they die:
Wherefore complainest thou? If thou live
      ill,
Thou art not singular: so, peace, be still.

Think but how many mighty men of yore
I've laid stark dead to stiffen in their gore,
By whom thou'rt but a scullion knave, perdie.
Content thee, then, and chide thy fate no more;
I rede thee, Villon, take it all in gree.

II

Oft have I girded me to wreak my spite
Upon great kings: lo, in the days gone by,
Priam I slew; and all his warlike might
Availed him nought, towers, walls nor ramparts high.
'Gainst Hannibal no less did I apply,
Who was attaint in Carthage by my skill:
And Scipio Africanus did I kill:
Great Cæsar to the Senate I gave o'er
And wrecked stout Pompey upon Egypt shore:
Jason I drowned by tempest on the sea
And burned both Rome and Romans heretofore:
I rede thee, Villon, take it all in gree.

III

Nay, Alexander, that renownèd knight,
  Who longed to reach the backward of the sky
And shed much blood, with poison did I blight;
  I made Arphaxad on the field to lie,
  Dead, by his royal standard. Thus did I
Full many a time and yet more will fulfil:
Nor time nor reason can awry my will.
  Huge Holophernes, too, that did adore
  Strange gods, whom Judith with his sword of war
Slew as he slept; and Absalom, as he
  Fled, by the love-locks hanged I that he wore.
I rede thee, Villon, take it all in gree.

ENVOI

Poor François, set my rede in thy heart's core:
If I could aught without God's leave or lore,
  I'd leave no rag to one of all that be;
For each ill done I'd compass half a score:
  I rede thee, Villon, take it all in gree.

Ballad Against Those Who Missay of France

I

Let him meet beasts that breathe out fiery rain,
Even as did Jason hard by Colchis town;
Or seven years changed into a beast remain,
Nebuchadnezzar-like, to earth bowed down;
Or suffer else such teen and mickle bale
As Helen's rape on Trojans did entail;
Or in Hell's marshes fallen let him fare
Like Tantalus and Proserpine or bear
A grievouser than Job his sufferance,
Prisoned and pent in Dædalus his snare,—
Who would wish ill unto the realm of France.

II

Four months within a marish let him plain,
Bittern-like, with the mud against his crown;
Or sell him to the Ottoman, to chain
And harness like an ox, the scurvy clown!
Or thirty years, like Maudlin, without veil
Or vesture, let him his misdeeds bewail;
Or with Narcissus death by drowning share;
Or die like Absalom, hanged by the hair;
Or Simon Magus, by his charms' mischance;
Or Judas, mad with horror and despair,—
Who would wish ill unto the realm of France.

III

If but Octavian's time might come again,
His molten gold should down his throat be thrown,
Or 'twixt two millstones he should grind for grain,
As did St. Victor; or I'd have him drown
Far out to sea, where help and breath should fail,
Like Jonah in the belly of the whale;
Let him be doomed the sunlight to forswear,
Juno her goods and Venus debonair,
And be of Mars oppressed to utterance, —
As was Antiochus the king, whilere, —
Who would wish ill unto the realm of France.

Envoi

Prince, may winds bear him to the wastes of air
Or to the mid-sea woods and sink him there:
Be all his hopes changed to desesperance;
For he deserves not any fortune fair
Who would wish ill unto the realm of France.

Ballad of the Debate of the Heart and Body of Villon

I

WHAT is't I hear? —'Tis I, thy heart; 'tis I
That hold but by a thread for frailty,
I have nor force nor substance, all drained dry,
Since thee thus lonely and forlorn I see,
Like a poor cur, curled up all shiveringly.
How comes it thus? — Of thine unwise liesse. —
What irks it thee? — *I* suffer the distress.
Leave me in peace. — Why? — I will cast about. —
When will that be? — When I'm past childishness. —
I say no more. — And I can do without.

II

What deemest thou? — To mend before I die. —
At thirty years? — 'Tis a mule's age, perdie. —
Is't childhood? — Nay. — 'Tis madness, then, doth ply
And grip thee? — Where? — By the nape. — Seemeth me

Nothing I know? — Yes, flies in milk, maybe:
Thou canst tell black from white yet at a press. —
Is't all? — What words can *all* thy faults express? —
If't's not enough, we'll have another bout. —
Thou 'rt lost. — I'll make a fight for't none the less. —
I say no more. — And I can do without.

III

Dule have I, pain and misery thou thereby:
If thou wert some poor idiot, happily
Thou mightst have some excuse thy heart anigh.
Lo, foul and fair are all alike to thee.
Or harder is thy head than stone by sea
Or more than honour likes thee this duresse.
Canst thou say aught in answer? Come, confess. —
I shall be quit on't when I die, no doubt.
God! what a comfort 'gainst a present stress!
I say no more. — And I can do without.

IV

Whence comes this evil? — Surely, from on high:
When Saturn made me up my fardel, he
Put all these ills in. — 'Tis a foolish lie:
Thou art Fate's master, yet its slave wilt be.
Thereof see Solomon his homily;
The wise, he says, no planets can oppress:
They and their influence own his mightiness. —
Nay, as they've made me, so shall it fall out. —
What sayst thou? — 'Tis the faith that I Profess. —
I say no more. — And I can do without.

ENVOI

Wilt thou live long? — So God vouchsafe me, yes. —
Then must thou — What? — Repent; forswear idlesse
And study — What? — The lore of righteousness. —
I'll not forget.— Forsake the motley rout
And to amendment straightway thee address:
Delay not till thou come to hopelessness.
I say no more. — And I can do without.

Ballad

Written by Villon upon a Subject proposed by Charles Duc D'Orleans

I

I DIE of thirst, although the spring's at hand;
Hot as a fire, my teeth with cold do shake:
In my own town, I'm in a foreign land;
Hard by a burning brazier do I quake;
Clad like a king, yet naked as a snake.
I laugh through tears, expect sans hope soe'er
And comfort take amiddleward despair;
Glad, though I joy in nought beneath the sun,
Potent am I, and yet as weak as air;
Well entertained, rebuffed of every one.

II

Nought's dim to me save what I understand;
Uncertain things alone for sure I take;
I doubt but facts that all unquestioned stand;
I'm only wise by chance for a whim's sake;
'Give you good-night!' I say, whenas I wake;
Lying at my length, of falling I beware;
I've goods enough, yet not a crown to spare!
Leave off a loser, though I still have won;
Await bequests, although to none I'm heir;
Well entertained, rebuffed of every one.

III

I care for nought, yet all my life I've planned
Goods to acquire, although I've none at stake;
They speak me fairest, by whom most I'm banned,
And truest, who most mock of me do make:
He is my friend, who causes me mistake
Black ravens for white swans and foul for fair;
Who doth me hurt, I hold him debonair;
'Twixt truth and lying difference see I none;
Nought I conceive, yet all in mind I bear;
Well entertained, rebuffed of every one.

Envoi

Most clement Prince, I'd have you be aware
That I'm like all and yet apart and rare;
Much understand, yet wit and knowledge shun:
To have my wage again is all my care;
Well entertained, rebuffed of every one.

Ballad of Villon's Request to the Duc De Bourbon

I

GRACIOUS my lord and prince of
mickle dread,
Flower of the Lily, Royal progeny,
François Villon, whom dule and teen have
led
To the blind strokes of Fate to bend the
knee,
Sues by this humble writing unto thee,
That thou wilt of thy grace to him make
loan.
Before all courts his debit he will own:
Doubt not but he thy right will satisfy,
With interest thereunder due and grown:
Nothing but waiting shalt thou lose thereby.

II

Of no prince has thy creature borrowéd,
Save of thyself, a single penny fee:
The six poor crowns were wholly spend
in bread,
That whiles thy favour did advance to me.
All shall be paid together, I agree,
And that right soon, ere many days be
flown;
For if in Patay wood are acorns known
Or chestnuts thereabouts folk sell and buy
In season thou shalt have again thine own:
Nothing but waiting shalt thou lose thereby.

III

If I could sell my youth and lustihead
  Unto the Lombards, usurers that be,
Lack-gold has brought me to such piteous
    stead,
  I do believe I should the venture dree.
  In purse or belt no money can I see:
I wonder what it is, by God His throne!
For unto me, save it be wood or stone,
  No cross at all appears,— I do not lie:
But, if the true cross once to me be shown,
  Nothing but waiting shalt thou lose thereby.

Envoi

Prince of the Lys, that lov'st good deeds
    alone,
Think'st thou it has not cost me many a
    groan
  That I can not to my intent draw nigh?
Give ear, if it so please thee, to my moan:
  Nothing but waiting shalt thou lose thereby.

SUNDRY POEMS
ATTRIBUTED TO VILLON

Here follow sundry Poems Commonly Attributed to Master Francois Villon

ROUNDEL

FAREWELL, I say, with tearful eye.
Farewell, the dearest sweet to see!
Farewell, o'er all the kindest she!
Farewell, with heavy heart say I.
Farewell, my love, my soul, good-bye!
My poor heart needs must part from thee:
Farewell, I say, with tearful eye.

Farewell, by whose default I die
Deaths more than told of tongue can be:
Farewell, of all the world to me
Whom most I blame and hold most high!
Farewell, I say, with tearful eye.

A Merry Ballad of Vintners

I

BY dint of dart, by push of sharpened spear,
By sweep of scythe or thump of spike-set mace,
By poleaxe, steel-tipped arrow-head or shear
Of double-handed sword or well-ground ace,
By dig of dirk or tuck with double face,
Let them be done to death; or let them light
On some ill stead, where brigands lurk by night,
That they the hearts from out their breasts may tear,
Cut off their heads, then drag them by the hair
And cast them on the dunghill to the swine,
That sows and porkers on their flesh may fare,
The vintners that put water in our wine.

II

Let Turkish quarrels run them through the rear
And rapiers keen their guts and vitals lace;
Singe their perukes with Greek fire, ay, and sear
Their brains with levins; string them brace by brace
Up to the gibbet; or for greater grace,
Let gout and dropsy slay the knaves outright:
Or else let drive into each felon wight
Irons red-heated in the furnace-flare:
Let half a score of hangmen flay them bare;
And on the morrow, seethed in oil or brine,
Let four great horses rend them then and there,
The vintners that put water in our wine.

III

Let some great gunshot blow their heads
off sheer;
Let thunders catch them in the market-
place;
Let rend their limbs and cast them far and
near,
For dogs to batten on their bodies base;
Or let the lightning-stroke their sight
efface.
Frost, hail and snow let still upon them
bite;
Strip off their clothes and leave them
naked quite,
For rain to drench them in the open air;
Lard them with knives and poniards and
then bear
Their carrion forth and soak it in the Rhine;
Break all their bones with mauls and do
not spare
The vintners that put water in our wine.

ENVOI

Prince, may God curse their vitals! is my
prayer;
And may they burst with venom all,
in fine,
These traitorous thieves, accursèd and
unfair,
The vintners that put water in our wine.

Ballad of the Tree of Love

I

I HAVE within my heart of hearts a tree,
A plant of Love, fast rooted therewithin,
That bears no fruit, save only misery;
Hardship its leaves and trouble its flowers bin.
But, since to set it there Love did begin,
It hath so mightily struck root and spread
That, for its shadow, all my cheer is fled
And all my joys do wither and decay:
Yet win I not, of all my lustihead,
Other to plant or tear the old away.

II

Year after year, its branches watered be
With tears as bitter and as salt as sin;
And yet its fruits no fairer are to see
Nor any comfort therefrom can I win:
Yet pluck I them among the leavis thin;
My heart thereon full bitterly is fed,
That better had lain fallow, ay, or dead,
Than to bear fruits of poison and dismay:
But Love his law allows me not instead
Other to plant or tear the old away.

III

If, in this time of May, when wood and lea
Are broidered all with leaves and blossoms sheen,
Love would vouchsafe this succour unto me, —
To prune away the boughs that lie between,
That so the sun among the buds be seen,
And imp thereon some graft of goodlihead, —
Full many a pleasant burgeon would it shed,
Whence joy should issue, lovelier than the day;
And no more where despair solicitèd
Other to plant or tear the old away.

ENVOI

Dear my Princess, my chiefest hope and dread,
Whom my heart serves in penitential stead,
The woes that harrow it do thou allay
And suffer not thy constant thought be led
Other to plant or tear the old away.

Ballad of Ladies' Love

No. I

I

Well enough favoured and with substance still
Some little stored, chance brought me 'neath love's spell
And day and night, until I had my will,
I pined in languor unendurable:
I loved a damsel more than I can tell;
But, with good luck and rose-nobles a score,
I had what men of maids have had before.
Then, in myself considering, I did say:
'Love sets by pleasant speech but little store;
The wealthy gallant always gains the day.'

II

So chanced in that, whilst coin my purse did fill,
The world went merry as a marriage bell
And I was all in all with her, until,
Without word said, my wanton's loose eyes fell
Upon a graybeard, rich but foul as hell:
A man more hideous never women bore.
But what of that? He had his will and more:
And I, confounded, stricken with dismay,
Upon this text went glosing passing sore:
'*The wealthy gallant always gains the day.*'

III

Now she did wrong; for never had she ill
  Or spite of me: I cherished her so well
That, had she asked me for the moon, my skill
  I had essayed to storm heaven's citadel.
  Yet, of sheer vice, her body did she sell
Unto the service of that satyr hoar:
The which I seeing, of my clerkly lore
  I made and sent to her a piteous lay:
And she: 'Lack-gold undid thee:' words but four.
  The wealthy gallant always gains the day.

ENVOI

Fair Prince, more skilled than any one of yore
In pleasant speech, look thou have coin galore
  Within thy pouch: as Meung that clerk so gay
And wise, hath told us, in the amorous war
  The wealthy gallant always gains the day.

Ballad of Ladies' Love [1]

No. 2

Here Endeth the Book of the Poems of Master François Villon

[1] This Ballad is omitted.

NOTES

NOTES

IN preparing the following, I have endeavoured, as far as possible, to avoid encumbering the book with a quantity of unnecessary notes, bearing upon information within the reach of every educated person, and have confined myself to throwing light, to the best of my ability, upon such points as must of necessity be obscure to all but a special student of the old poet. Even this limited scheme must unavoidably be but imperfectly carried out: many of Villon's allusions to persons, places and things are at the present day hopelessly obscure and inexplicable, owing to our defective acquaintance with his life and times, and I have chosen to leave untouched the passages wherein they occur, rather than hamper the text with a mass of vague and purely conjectural explanations, which my readers are perfectly well qualified to suggest for themselves. Those admirers of the poet, who are desirous of making themselves more minutely acquainted with the labours of modern criticism, should consult the monographs of MM. Bijvanck, Longnon and Vitu and the editions cited in my prefatory note, where they will find all that is at present known or conjectured on the subject ably and impartially stated and discussed.

NOTES TO THE LESSER TESTAMENT

Octave i. line 7. — *Vegetius.* Flavii Vegetii Epitome Rei Militaris, the translation (or rather paraphrase) of which by Jehan de Meung, under the title of "L'Art de Chevalerie selon Vegesse," is frequently cited by mediaeval writers.

Oct. ix. — Villon seems here to burlesque the customs of chivalry, feigning himself a knight and bequeathing the paraphernalia of knighthood to some relative charged to maintain the honour of the name.

Oct. xii. — *The White Horse, Mule, Diamond and Striped Ass* were probably signs of well-known taverns. The Decretal *Omnis utrius sexus* was (according to M. Prompsault) one ordering all Christians to confess at least once a year to their parish priest and had lately been revived against the Mendicant Orders, by the repeal of an intermediate Bull authorising the latter to receive confessions in detriment to the rights of the regular clergy.

Oct. xiii. — *The Wether, Gad, Crowned Ox and Cow and Churl.* Probably also tavern signs.

Oct. xv. — *The Art of Memory.* Probably either the Ars Memorativa or the Ars Memoriae of Jacobus Publicius, popular mnemonic treatises of the middle ages. *Misprepense.* Malpensé, probably as M. Bijvanck suggests, a farce-type or personification of a hairbrained witless man, of the family of Maugouverne, Malàvisé, Malduit, Malemort, etc., in the popular stage-pieces, farces, *sotties* moralities and mysteries of the time. Villon here, according to his usual practice, first makes a bequest and then virtually annuls it, giving the legatee the book called *the Art of Memory,* but directing it to be procured from Malpensé, the one person of all others who would not possess it. It may be noted, once for all, that this underlying contradiction in terms is the motive of most of the fantastic legacies contained in the poet's two Testaments.

Oct. xvi. l. 7. — Clément Marot suggests that the shop in question was to be that of a scribe or public writer. *Also the acorns willows bear.* Another instance of an illusory bequest as willows of course bear no *gland* or acorns.

Oct. xix. — According to M. Lacroix, the Castle of Nygeon and Bicêtre near Paris were both in ruins in Villon's time and the haunt of numerous bands of thieves and vagabonds. They were probably well known to the poet, who facetiously bequeaths the right of shelter in them to Montigny and Grigny, fellow-rogues of his.

Oct. xx. — *The 'Puppet' Cistern.* L'Abreuvoyr Poupin, a well-known resort of rogues and vagabonds on the Pont Neuf, apparently a sort of succursal to the more celebrated Cour des Miracles. The text may, perhaps, be read as referring to a low tavern situate in the neighbourhood. *The Fir-Cone* or (*Fir Apple*) *Tavern.* Le Cabaret de la

Pomme de Pin, the most famous of its time in Paris, situate in the Rue de la Juiverie and mentioned by many writers of the day. *Back to chair.* Le doz aux rains, *i.e.*, le dos aux reins, lit. "back to loins," *i.e.* lying back in an unceremonious attitude of comfortable abandon in his chair. *Rains* may also be read as for *raims*, an old French form of *rameaux*, branches, often used in the sense (v. Diez, Ducange, etc.) of "faggots," in which case *le doz aux rains* would mean "with his back to the faggots piled up beside the fire." M. Bijvanck's proposal to read "le doz aux rais," *i. e.*, back to the rays of the sun, is too far-fetched for adoption. This octave is one of the most garbled in the whole work and has been a favourite battle-ground of the commentators.

Oct. xxi. l. 3. — *That baron's grace.* The baron alluded to appears to have been the Lieutenant-Criminal of Paris. Jehan Mautainct and Pierre Basanier were officials of his (the Châtelet) Court.

Oct. xxii. — *The Helmet.* Apparently a tavern sign. *La Pierre au Lait*, according to M. Longnon, was an old name for the Rue des Ecrivains (formerly) near St. Jacques de la Boucherie. *The Three Lilies.* Les Trois-Lis, supposed by some commentators to have been the name of a dungeon (perhaps Les Trois-Lits, the Three Beds) in the Châtelet Prison; but a reference is probably meant to some tavern sign.

Oct. xxiii. — Some sort of play appears to be here intended upon the word *Barre*, in its heraldic sense of bend sinister or sign of illegitimacy and its mediaeval meaning of merchant's bar or counter. *Goodcheap man* or Chapman. Un bon marchant, a cant name for a thief; who, getting goods cheap, *i. e.*, for nothing, can afford to sell them again at a low price The legatee seems to have been a *souteneur* or prostitute's bully; hence the gift of straw, which was used by women of ill fame in lieu of carpet. Some versions of this passage read *marquand* for *marchant*, in which case Villon may be supposed to have intended a play upon the word *marque*, a mediaeval slang equivalent for our *doxy* or *blowen*; thus *marquand* might mean dealer in *marques* or wenches, which would accord with the legatee's character.

Oct. xxiv. — Chollet and Jehan de Loup. Thieves of Villon's acquaintance. *A duck.* It seems uncertain whether the poet refers to the ducks and geese kept by the city of Paris and adjacent commoners upon the water-moats, or to the prostitutes (known by the cant names of *oies* and *canettes*) who used to haunt the dry moats after sundown.

Oct. xxvii. l. 1. — *My right of nomination.* "Les *nominations* étaient une certaine quantité de prebendes attribuées aux gradués des Universités par l'Article 15 de la Pragmatique." Coquillart, Ed. Héricault I., p. 131, n. 2.

Oct. xxix. l. 1. — *The Crozier of the street Of St. Antoine.* A tavern sign, evidently introduced for the sake of a play upon the words *crosse* (crozier) and *on crosse* (folk beat or butt, strike the ball with the cue).

Oct. xxx. — *The lodgers 'neath the stalls,* i. e., the beggars and vagabonds who used to lie under the street-booths or stalls by night. *Each one a buffet on the eye.* Chascun sur l'oeil une grongnée. "*Groignet,* gourmade, coup de poing sur l'oeil ou visage" — *Ducange.*

Oct. xxxii. l. 6. — *The Fifteen Signs.* Les Quinze Signes du Jugement dernier, a favourite theme of mediaeval homily and morality.

Oct. xxxiii. — *Le Mortier d'Or.* Probably the sign of some well-known shop or tavern at Paris, facetiously bequeathed to Jehan de la Garde, in allusion to his nick-name of 'Epicier.' *To grind his mustard.* Broyer sa moutarde, according to M. Bijvanck, anciently meant "to chew upon one's ill humour or chagrin." The *pestle from St. Maur* would seem to have been a gibbet. (The legatee, as a sergeant of the watch, was of course one of Villon's natural enemies.) I believe the double-handed pestle was at one time called *potence,* on account of its resemblance to an ordinary cross-barred gallows. M. Moland thinks it may have meant one of the crutches hung up *ex-voto* in the Church of St. Maur. In the seventh line of the same stanza Villon says, *St. Anthony roast him full sore!* alluding to the erysipelatous disease known as St. Anthony's fire.

Oct. xxxiv.— *Gouvieux* (says M. Lacroix) was a castle

on the Oise, of which Peter de Ronseville was probably governor. It is possible that Villon had been imprisoned there and made this bequest to the gaolers, in derisive memory of his sufferings at their hands. *Such crowns . . . as the prince giveth for largesse*, i. e., none at all, princes in general (or perhaps some contemporary prince in particular renowned for his closefistedness) being in the habit of promising much, but giving little.

Octaves xxxvi-viii. — These three octaves appear to be a clumsy paraphrase (or perhaps parody) of some popular mediaeval abstract or digest of Aristotle *de Animâ* in use in the schools.

Oct. xl. l. 7. — *Pewter*. Billion, i. e., base or small coin, other than silver.

NOTES TO THE GREATER TESTAMENT

Oct. v. — *I'm ill at reading*, i. e. prayers. Some texts have *lire*, others *dire*, but the two expressions are practically synonymous and signify the act of supplication, prayers in the Middle Ages being always *read*. *'Twould be but such as Picard's were*; i. e. none at all, the Picards or heretics of the Walloon country being popularly credited with dispensing altogether with prayer, probably from the fact that they eschewed prayers for the dead.

Oct. vi. ll. 7 and 8. — *The seventh verse . . . Of the Psalm Deus laudem*. This is the *eighth* verse of Psalm cix. of the English version (*Hold not Thy tongue, O God of my praise!*) and stands thus, *Let his days be few and another take his office*. Villon's intention in applying it to the Bishop of Orleans is still more obvious when we compare the Vulgate version, 'Fiant, dies ejus pauci et *episcopatum* ejus accipiat alter.'

Oct. x. l. 6. — *The late Lord Dauphin*, i. e. Louis XI himself, who bore the title of Dauphin of Viennois during his father's lifetime.

Oct. xii. l. 8. — *Averrhoes his Comment*, i. e. upon Aristotle.

Oct. xx. ll. 7-8. — *Valerius . . . Of Rome styled Greatest*. Valerius Maximus. The anecdote of Diomedes and Alexander appears to have been taken not from Valerius,

as stated in the text, but from a fragment of Cicero de Republicâ, quoted by Monius Marcellus, in which the corsair's name is not given.

Oct. xxx. l. 7. — *Shod, breeched like oyster-fishers*, i. e. barelegged and footed?

Oct. xxxvi. l. 5. — *Jacques Coeur*. The great French merchant and patriot, whose liberality enabled Charles VII to accomplish the reconquest of France and who afterwards fell into disgrace through Court intrigues.

Oct. xxxvii. l. 2. — *Alas, no longer is he one!* Alluding of course to Jacques Coeur, who died at Chio, Nov. 25, 1456.

Oct. xxxix. ll. 5, 7. — *High-tired or hooded*, i. e. ladies of quality or women of the middle class.

Ballad of Old-Time Ladies, ii. 5. — *The queen who willed, etc.* Marguerite de Bourgogne, wife of Louis le Hutin, King of France. Cf. Dumas' famous drama, *La Tour de Nesle*.

First Ballad of Old-Time Lords, iii. 6. — *Lancelot, King of Behaine*. This appears, at first sight, to refer to the fabulous hero of La Mort d'Arthur, Lancelot du Lac, King of Bayonne or Behaine, but the commentators are probably correct in supposing the person whom the poet had in view to be Wladislaw, King of Bohemia, who died in 1457.

The Complaint of the Fair Helm-maker. — *La Belle Heaulmière*. Opinions differ as to whether this personage was a woman of loose life, so called from the tall cap, *helm* or hennin, said to have been worn by her class, or a grisette whose occupation was the manufacture or sale of such articles or of actual helmets. iv. l. 3. — *Even had he made me faggots bear*. Et m'eust il fait les rains trayner. A possible alternative reading is "Even had he made me drag my loins," i. e. ground me to the earth with hard work and ill usage.

Oct. lvii. l. 4. — *That a felt hat a* mortar *was*. The *mortier* or square cap worn by the Judges of the Parliament is probably meant.

Oct. lxiii. ll. 2 and 3. — *Made me drink of water cold So much*. An allusion to the question by water, which Villon appears to have more than once undergone during his confinement in Meung gaol.

Oct. lxiv. l. 7.— *As God loves Lombards, etc.* It may, perhaps, be necessary to remind the reader that the Lombards, as the usurers of the middle ages and the inventors of banking and pawn-broking, bore much the same evil repute as the Jews of our own day.

Oct. lxviii. ll. 7 and 8.— *Nor will I make it manifest Except unto the realm cf France.* It appears to have been in Villon's time obligatory, or at all events customary, to deposit (or *manifest*) wills with an ecclesiastical offiicial during the lifetime of the testator. Villon afterwards (see Oct. clxxii.) expresses his intention of cheating the Registrar of Wills of his fees.

Oct. lxxviii. l. 2.— "*The Devil's Crake*" *Romaunt.* Le Rommant du Pet-au-Diable. The researches of M. Marcel Schwob in the Archives Nationales of France have brought to light the judicial record of the protracted litigation between the University and the Provostry of Paris, consequent upon the measures taken by the latter for the putting down of certain riotous proceedings of the undergraduates, which kept the city in an uproar for the greater part of three years (1451-3) and which had their origin in the carrying-off by the students of a great *borne,* (a curb- or mere-stone, intended, in the absence of a foot-path, to protect the front of the house before which it was planted against passing vehicles,) called "Le Pet-au-Diable" and belonging to the *hctel* or town residence of a widow lady of quality, by name Catherine de Béthisy, Damoiselle de Bruyères. Villon doubtless bore his full share in this riotous frolic of his contemporaries at the University and we may reasonably suppose the "Romaunt" in question (which appears to be irretrievably lost) to have been a burlesque epic (probably a parody of the Chansons de Geste) of his fashion, celebrating his own and his fellow-students' exploits in the matter of the famous *borne.* Cf. Oct. cxxxiv, post.

Ballad that Villon made at the request of his Mother, etc.— *Mary of Egypt.* V. Jac. de Voragine, Leg. Sanctorum (Leg. Aurea), Vit. Sanctae Mariae Aegyptiacae. *And eke Theophilus.* Theophilus, Vicar-general (*vicedominus*) of the diocese of Adana in Cilicia in the sixth century, being deposed by his bishop, sold

himself to the devil to have his office again, but being presently seized with remorse, besought the Virgin, for whom he had always (like the late Cardinal Newman) professed an especial devotion, with such insistance that she, remembering her of his past good service, intervened on his behalf and compelled the Evil One to restore the contract. This legend was the subject of numerous mediaeval poems and mysteries, of which the most celebrated, *Le Miracle de Théophile*. was the composition of the thirteenth century trouvère Rutubeuf, who also left a poem on "La Vie de Sainte Marie L'Egipcienne."

Oct. lxxxvii. — *The White Horse, Mare, Mule, Brick-red Ass.* Tavern signs.

Oct. lxxxviii. l. 3 and 4. — *Of wine of Aulnis, from Turgis Taken at my peril, casks fourteen. Prins à mes perilz* may also mean "taken up at my charges." Robin Turgis was the host of the Pomme Du Pin, on whom Villon is reputed to have played the Baigneux wine trick mentioned in the Repues Franches; (cf. Introduction, p. 40).

Oct. lxxxix. — *Though he's a chapman by estate.* Chapman (*marchand*) may here mean "thief." See my previous note on this word, Lesser Testament. Oct. xxiii. *My sword, without the scabbard. Branc*, the word here used for sword, probably because of its similarity in sound to *bran* or *bren*, merda. The intention is obvious. *Levied on those that come and go Within the Temple cloister-place.* A good instance of an illusory bequest. The "Cousture du Temple" being private property and enclosed, there would be no comers and goers there to be assessed.

Oct. xci. l. 2. — *The Muckle Mugin Grève.* The Grand Godet de Grève, apparently a wine-shop in the Place de Grève.

Oct. xcii. l. 8. — *Mother Maschicoue.* A well-known *rotisseuse* or vendor of ready-roasted poultry, etc., whose shop was in La Porte Paris, near the Grand Châtelet.

Oct. xcix. l. 6. — *The cooper's mall.* — Le hutinet. This word, in another sense, is the diminutive of *hutin*, n. and a., brawling, quarrelsomeness, contention, also quarrelsome, contentious; hence the equivoque of the following lines.

Oct. c. l. 3. — *Good-cheap man*, i. e., thief. See previous notes.

Oct. ci. l. 2. — *An hundred cloves*. Cent clouz. An untranslatable play of words upon the word *clou*, in its double meaning of *nail* and *clove*.

Oct. cv. l. 8. — *The Abbess of Shaven-poll*. Huguette du Hamel, Abbess of Port Royal or Pourras, near Paris, a dissolute woman, whose shameless debaucheries earned her the popular perversion of her title to *Abbesse de Poil-Ras* or *Shaven-poll*, the cant name for a prostitute who had been pilloried.

Oct. cvi. l. 8 — *Contemplation*. Contemplation . . . the equivoque intended in the use of the French word is sufficiently obvious.

Oct. cvii. — *Nay, 'tis not that I give them this, But from their loins all children spring, Through God*. Mais de touz enffans sont les meres En Dieu. This is a hopelessly obscure passage and one can only guess at the meaning. *They love their husbands so*. Ilz ayment ainsi leurs maris, *i. e.*, this is their (the monks') way of showing their love for the husbands. M. Longnon makes the unaccountable remark on this passage that *ilz* is here used for *elles*.

Oct. cviii. l. 5. — *Meung*. Jehan de Meung, one of the authors of the *Roman de la Rose*. *Jehan Poullieu*. Johannes de Poliaco, a theologian of the fourteenth century, who wrote against the Mendicant Friars and whose writings were condemned by Pope John XXII. *Matheolus*. A Latin poet of Boulonge-sur-Mer in the thirteenth century.

Ballad and Orison, i. 6. — *Architriclimus*. Ἀρχιτρίκλῖνος, the Greek designation of the *governor of the feast* at the marriage in Cana, mistaken by Villon for a proper name.

Oct. cxviii. l. 3. — *Donatus*. The Latin grammar of the day, Aelius Donatus *de octo partibus orationis*.

Oct. cxxiii. l. 1. — *The Clerks Eighteen*. Le Collége des Dix-Huit at Paris was founded in the time of St. Louis for the education of poor students.

Oct. cxxvi. — *The Castle of Billy* was doubtless in the same ruinous and thief-haunted state as Nygeon and Bicêtre. Grigny seems to have been a coiner.

Oct. cxxvii. l. 3. — *The Canteen.* Le Barillet, probably a tavern sign.

Oct. cxxviii. l. 8. — *The Lord who serves St. Christopher.* The nobleman here alluded to is Robert d'Estouteville, Provost of Paris, in honour of whose marriage with Ambrois de Loré Villon composed the Ballad which follows, presumably in his student-days. The Provost appears to have made some special vow of service to St. Christopher (who was supposed to protect his devotees against *malemort*, i. e. death unshriven), according to frequent mediaeval custom.

Oct. cxxix. l. 6. — *That tourney King René made.* A celebrated tournament or *pas d'armes* held by René of Anjou at Saumur in 1446.

Ballad for a newly married Gentleman, ii. 3 and 4. — *Clary . . . sweet bay,* Olivier franc, . . . Lorier souef. An evident punning allusion to the name of the bride, which, by the way, is reproduced, *en acrostiche,* in the initial letters of the first fourteen lines of the original ballad. *Ambroise* is the old French name of the clary or wild sage (*O. E.* Ambrose) which was apparently also known as *Olivier franc,* wild olive. Loré is an old form of *laurier,* laurel or sweet bay.

Oct. cxxx. — The Perdryers were apparently fellow-thieves or comrades of Villon's, who had betrayed or cheated him in some unexplained way; perhaps turned King's evidence against him in respect of one or other of the nefarious transactions in which they were jointly concerned. The latter part of the octave seems to point to an information laid by François Perdryer against the poet in consequence of which the latter was punished for some one of his numerous escapades by the Parliament of Bourges.

Oct. cxxxi. l. 1. — *Taillevent. Le Viandier de Maître Taillevent,* cook to Charles VII, was the popular cookery-book of the time.

Ballad Entitled the Counterblast to Franc-Gontier. — *Les Dictz de Franc-Gontier,* by Philippe de Vitré, Bishop of Meaux, was a popular pastoral romance of the fourteenth century, celebrating the delights of a country life: it was imitated in another book, entitled *Les*

Contredictz de Franc-Gontier, in which are set forth the discomforts of a pastoral life and the hardships that arose from the oppression of the squires and seigneurs of the time, personified in a character called *le Tyran* and modelled upon some great nobleman of the day.

Oct. cxxxiv. — *Madame de Bruyères*. Catherine de Béthisy, Damoiselle de Bruyères. See ante, note to Oct. lxxviii.

Oct. cxxxv. l. 6. — *Macrobius*. The Latin rhetorician and grammarian, author of the well-known Commentary upon the *Somnium Scipionis* of Cicero and of other books in great repute during the Middle Ages.

Oct. cxxxviii. ll. 1 and 2. — *Wenches who Have fathers mothers, aunts* . . . i. e., prostitutes. Brothel-keepers and procuresses have always borne some such name as *tante*, expressing their relation to the unfortunates under their control.

Oct. cxxxix. l. 8. — *Methinks, one scarce were damn'd for it:* i. e., for diverting a part of the superfluity of the monks and nuns to the benefit of the needy *filles de joie*.

[Ballad of Villon and Muckle Meg. — "The spirit of Villon is still living in the literature of France. Fat Peg is oddly of a piece with the work of Zola, the Goncourts, and the infinitely greater Flaubert; and, while similar in ugliness, still surpasses them in native power. The old author, breaking with an *éclat de voix*, out of his tongue-tied century, has not yet been touched on his own ground, and still gives us the most vivid and shocking impression of reality. Even if that were not worth doing at all, it would be worth doing as well as he has done it; for the pleasure we take in the author's skill repays us, or at least reconciles us to the baseness of his attitude. Fat Peg (*La Grosse Margot*) is typical of much; it is a piece of experience that has nowhere else been rendered into literature; and a kind of gratitude for the author's plainness mingles, as we read, with the nausea proper to the business. I shall quote here a verse of an old student's song, worth laying side by side with Villon's startling ballade. This singer, also, had an unworthy mistress, but he did not choose to share the wages of dishonor; and it is thus, with both wit and pathos, that he laments her fall: —

'Nunc plango florem
  Aetatis tenerae
Nitidiorem
  Veneris sidere:
Tunc columbinam
  Mentis dulcedinem,
Nunc serpentinam
  Amaritudinem.
Verbo rogantes
  Removes ostio,
Munera dantes
  Foves cubiculo,
    Illos abire praecipis
    A quibus nihil accipis,
    Caecos claudosque recipis,
    Viros illustres decipis
      Cummelle venenosa.' " [1]

— Robert Louis Stevenson (*Preface to Familiar Studies of Men and Books*).

Oct. cxlii. — *Master Hal.* Maître Henriot, the executioner of Paris. *Noel Wellbeseen*, Noel Joliz, the object of the unpleasant bequest made by this octave, is conjectured by some commentators to have been the poet's favoured rival with Catherine de Vaucelles and the person to whom he owed the beating mentioned in Stanza v of the Double Ballad of Light Loves. (q. v.).

Oct. cxlvii. l. 1. — *The Fifteen-Score.* The name (Quinze-Vingts) of a hospital at Paris founded by St. Louis for the reception of three hundred poor blind men, who were bound by the terms of their foundation to furnish mourners for all funerals taking place in the adjoining Cemetery of the Innocents.

Oct. cliii. — The transposition (now first made by M. Longnon from the MSS.) of this octave, which stands in all previous editions as Oct. cliv., from *after* to *before* the Roundel, "On my release," restores a very corrupt passage to its original sense, making it evident that the *lais* or ditty dedicated to the dead is, not (as seemed to be the case under the former arrangement) the Roundel aforesaid,

[1] *Gaudeamus: Carmina vagorum selecta.* Leipsic Trubner. 1879.

(which now appears in its true character, as the *lais*, mod. *legs*. given to Jacques Cardon) but the three elegiac octaves cxlix-cli. This restoration shows us how the old editors blundered into entitling the Roundel "Lais ou plutôt Rondeau" (two very different things), being misled by the introversion into mistaking *lais*, lay, for *lais*, legacy, the word having both meanings in old French.

Oct. clv. l. 2. — *Alain Chartier's Lay*. L'Hôpital d'Amour.

Oct. clvi. ll. 7 and 8. — There appears to be some equivoque intended here upon the popular meaning of the word *truie*, i. e., prostitute.

Oct. clvii. — *The Seneschal* here mentioned appears to have been Louis de Bourbon, Seneschal et Mareschal du Bourbonnais, who is thought to have sheltered Villon, during his second exile, at his town of Roussillon in Dauphiné. The third line contains a play of words upon his title of *Mareschal* (technicè, *blacksmith*), and the fourth, a possible allusion to the Prince's amorous disposition, *oies et canettes* being (as before mentioned) cant terms for women of loose life.

Oct. clviii. l. 6. — *The Blacksmiths' Provost*. Tristan l'Hermite.

Oct. clix. l. 1. — *Chappelain*. Probably a member of Villon's gang, upon whose name or nickname he plays.

Oct. clxiii. l. 2. — According to M. Lacroix, the Convent of St. Avoye was the only one at Paris which was situate on the second floor and consequently contained no burial place.

Oct. clxvi. l. 2. — *The 'Belfry' Bell*. The largest of the bells of Notre Dame, called *Le Beffroi* and rung only on great occasions.

Oct. clxvii. l. 4. — *St. Stephen's loaves*, i. e., stones.

Oct. clxx. l. 6. — *Philip Brunel*. Supposed to have been the Seigneur de Grigny twice previously named by Villon, *i. e.*, L. T., Oct. xviii. and G. T. Oct. cxxvi.

Oct. clxxii. l. 8. — *Perrette's Den*. Le Trou Perrette, a low cabaret and gambling-hell at Paris.

NOTES TO DIVERS AND SUNDRY POEMS

Ballad of Villon in Prison. — Apparently written in Meung gaol.

Variant, &c. — This is undoubtedly a spurious amplification of the foregoing Quatrain, but it is so well known that I have thought it well to leave it in its usual place among the occasional poems.

Epitaph in Ballad-Form. — Apparently written whilst awaiting execution for the burglary committed at the Collége de Navarre in 1456. (The two following Ballads appear to have been composed on the same occasion. The actual appeal to the Parliament against the sentence of death has not been handed down to us.)

Ballad of Villon's Appeal, i. 1. — *Garnier.* Etienne Garnier, not (as hitherto supposed) the procureur or proctor who defended Villon on this occasion but (according to a note in the Stockholm MS.) the *clerc du guichet* or head gaoler of the Conciergerie Prison.

Do., ii. 1 and 2. — The Chanson de Geste of Hugues Capet, the founder of the Bourbon dynasty, represents him as the son of Richer, Sire de Beaugency, and of Beatrix, the daughter of a butcher of Montmartre. Dante also adopts the popular tradition to the same effect, putting into the mouth of the shade of the hero the words, *Figliuol fui d'un beccaio di Parigi.* (Purg. xx. 52). *Figliuol* may be read in its wider sense of "lineal descendant," but another version of the legend represents Capet's father himself as a butcher of great wealth, who married the widowed Duchess of Orleans. The whole story, however, appears to have had no foundation in fact.

Ballad of Proverbs. — It is hardly necessary to note that the point of the refrain lies in the contemporary use of the word *Noël* (Christmas) as an exclamation in the sense of *Hurrah!* or *Vivat!* etc. ii. l. 5. — *Some love God till from church they trend.* On reconsideration, I am convinced that this line should read *fuyt* (not *suyt*) *l'Eglise.* The substitution of the long *s* for the *f* is the commonest of copyists' blunders and the rectification is indicated by the intention of the line, which is manifestly antithetical.

Ballad of Things known and unknown, iii. 7. — *How misled Bohemians were.* The allusion here is supposed to be to the Hussite movement.

Ballad against those who Missay of France, iii. l. 1. — The "Octovien" named in this line is not, as supposed by M. Longnon, the Roman Emperor Augustus, whose adoptive name was Octavianus and who was a comparatively mild and beneficent ruler, but the imaginary tyrant of mediaeval romance, the *Kaiser Octavianus* of Tieck and the old legends.

The Debate of Villon's Body and Soul. — Probably written in Meung gaol.

Ballad of Villon's Request, ii. 7. — According to M. Prompsault, there never was a wood at or near Patay. iii 7, 8, 9. — An audacious play of words, founded upon the double meaning of the word *croix*, i. e., *cross* and *money*, e. g., the well-known phrase, *Il n'a ni croix ni pile* —'He has not a rap.' The obverse of the coin of the time, now distinguished by the portrait of the prince issuing it, was then generally stamped with a cross, the reverse being called *pile*, a name which still survives. An apt instance of the old English use of the word 'cross' in the sense of the more modern 'rap' occurs in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Faithful Friends*, act. i. sc. 2;

> *Const.* Pray, gentlemen, will you pay your reckoning there?
> *Snip.* Not a *cross*, by this hand!

The mention of *the true cross* in the ninth line is a daring allusion to the famous *Vraie croix de St. Lo* to which Louis XI professed a special devotion.

Sundry Poems attributed to Villon. — These (with the possible exception of the Ballad of Vintners) are certainly not by Villon; but as they have considerable merit of their own and are generally included in his works, I have thought it well to let them stand. The Ballad of the Tree of Love has recently been identified as the composition of Alain Chartier, whilst the two Ballads of Ladies' Love are probably of considerably later date, possibly altogether comparatively modern imitations of the ancient style. The Merry Ballads of Vintners is the only one that bears any trace of Villons' hand and may possibly be an early or

inferior specimen of his work. As for the Roundel, the authorship of this tender little piece may perhaps be assigned to Eustache Deschamps, whose style it much resembles; cf. the Champenois poet's very similar *Rondeau des adieux à sa dame*, "Adieu, mon cuer; adieu, ma joye," etc.